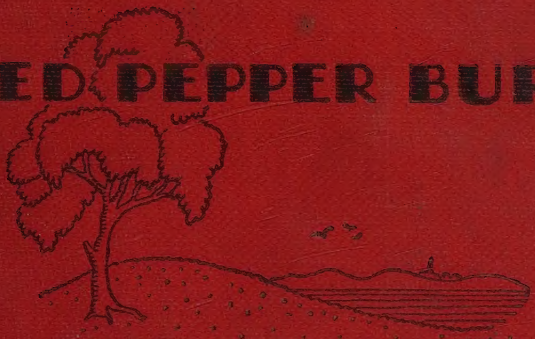
RED PEPPER BURNS



GRACE S. RICHMOND

RED PEPPER BURNS

By

GRACE S. RICHMOND

R. P. Burns, M.D. whose red hair and fiery temper earned him the nickname of "Red Pepper" was a country doctor—one of those whole-souled, devoted enthusiasts who would rather relieve some neighbor's suffering than eat his own dinner. In the little suburb where, by choice, he had his office and his bachelor home, everyone loved him and many of his friends, particularly the unmarried women tried hard to get for themselves a larger share of the real friendship which he could bestow when not completely preoccupied with his work.

Red Pepper's life was a crowded one, what with his country calls, his night work, and his frequent trips to the hospital in the big city near by. But it became even more crowded after he took into his bachelor home a little orphan boy and after he found himself falling in love with a beautiful and noble woman.

There are few writers who can so convincingly create real, average human beings. That gift belongs to Grace Richmond in a high degree, and in *Red Pepper Burns* she has created a character who has warmed the hearts of hundreds of thousands of readers.

TRIANGLE BOOKS
14 West 49th Street, New York City

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GRACE S. RICHMOND

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RED PEPPER BURNS

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH HE VOWS A VOW

"THERE comes the Green Imp."

"How can you tell?"

"Don't you hear? Red's coming in on five cylinders for all he can get out of 'em. Anybody else would stop and fix up. He's in too much of a hurry—as usual."

The Green Imp tore past the porch where Burns's neighbours waved arms of greeting which he failed to see, for he did not turn his head. The car went round the curve of the driveway at perilous speed, and only the fact that from road to old red barn was a good twenty rods made it seem possible that the Green Imp could come to a standstill in time to prevent its banging into the rear wall of the barn.

Two minutes later Burns ran by the Chesters' porch on his way to his own. Chester hailed him.

"What's your everlasting hurry, Red? Come up and sit down and cool off."

"Not now," called back a voice curtly, out of the June twilight. The big figure ran on and disappeared into the small house, the door slamming shut behind it.

"Red's in a temper. Tell by the sound of his voice."

"Is he ever in anything except a temper?" inquired a guest of the Chesters. Arthur Chester turned on her.

"Show's you don't know him much, Pauline. He's the owner of the fiercest good disposition ever heard of. He's the pepperiest proposition of an angel this earth has ever seen. He's a red-headed, sharp-tongued brute of a saint——"

"Why, Arthur Chester!"

"He's a pot of mustard that's clear balm—if you don't mind getting stung when it's applied."

"Well, of all the——"

"I'm going over to get something for this abominable headache—and, incidentally, to find out what's the row. He's probably lost a patient—it always goes to his brain like that. When he abuses his beloved engine that way it's

because some other machinery has stopped somewhere."

"If he's lost a patient you'd better let him alone, dear," advised his wife, Winifred.

"No—he needs to get his mind off it, on me. I can fix up a few symptoms for him."

"He'll see through you," called Mrs. Chester softly, after him.

"No doubt of that. But it may divert him, just the same."

Chester made his way across the lawn and in at the side door which led to the dimly lighted village offices of Redfield Pepper Burns, physician and surgeon. Not that the gilt-lettered sign on the glass of the office door read that way. "R. P. Burns, M. D." was the brief inscription above the table of "office hours," and the owner of the name invariably so curtailed it. But among his friends the full name had inevitably been turned into the nickname, for the big, red-haired, quick-tempered, warm-hearted fellow was "Red Pepper Burns" as irresistibly to them as he had been, a decade earlier, to his classmates in college.

As Chester went in at the door a figure arose slowly from its position—flung full length, face

downward, on a couch in the shadowy inner office—and came into view.

"Toothache? Dentist down the street," said a blurred voice unsympathetically.

Chester laughed. "Oh, come, Red," said he. "Give me some of that headache dope. I'm all out."

"Glad to hear it. You don't get any more from me."

"Why not? I've got a sure-enough headache—I didn't come over to quiz you. The blamed thing whizzes like a buzz saw."

"Can't help it. Go soak it."

Chester advanced. "I'll get the powders myself, then. I know the bottle."

A substantial barrier interposed. "No, you don't. You've taken up six ounces of that stuff in seven days. You quit to-night."

"Look here, Red, what's the use of taking it out on me like that, if you are mad at something? If your head——"

"I wish it did ache—like ten thousand furies. It might take some of the pressure off somewhere else," growled R. P. Burns. He shut the door of the inner office hard behind him.

"I thought so," declared Arthur Chester, suddenly forgetting about his headache in his anxiety to know the explanation of the five cylinders. It was a small suburban town in which they lived, and if something had gone wrong it was a matter of common interest. "Can you tell me about it?" he asked—a little diffidently, for none knew better than he that things could not always be told, and that no lips were locked tighter than Red Pepper's when the secret was not his to tell.

"Engine's on the blink. Got to go out and fix it," was the unpromising reply. Burns picked up a spark-plug from the office desk as he spoke.

"Had your dinner?"

"Don't want it."

"Shall I go out with you?"

The answer was an unintelligible grunt. As Chester was about to follow his friend out—for there could be no doubt that Red Pepper Burns was his friend in spite of this somewhat surly, though by no means unusual, treatment—another door opened tentatively, and a head was cautiously inserted.

"Your dinner's ready, Doctor Burns," said a doubtful voice.

Burns turned. "Leave a pitcher of milk on the table for me, Cynthia," he said in a gentler voice than Chester had yet heard from him tonight, crisp though it was. "Nothing else."

Chester, catching a glimpse of a brightly lighted dining-room and a table lavishly spread, undertook to remonstrate. He had seen the housekeeper's disappointed face, also. But Burns cut him short.

"Come along—if you must," said he, and stalked out into the night.

For an hour, in the light from one of the Green Imp's lamps, Chester sat on an overturned box and watched Burns work. He worked savagely, as if applying surgical measures to a mood as well as to a machine. He worked like a skilled mechanic as well; every turn of a nut, every polish of a thread meaning definite means to an end. The night was hot and he had thrown off coat and collar and rolled his sleeves high, so a brawny arm gleamed in the bright lamplight, and the open shirt exposed a powerful neck. Chester, who was of slighter build and not as tall as he would have liked to be, watched enviously.

"Whatever goes wrong with your affairs, Red," he observed suddenly, breaking a long interval

during which the engine had been made to throb and whirl like the "ten thousand furies" to whom its engineer had lately made allusion, "you have the tremendous asset of a magnificent body to fall back on for comfort."

With a movement of the hand Burns stopped his engine, now running quietly, and stood up straight. He threw out one bare arm, grimy and oily with his labours. "Two hours ago," said he in a voice now controlled and solemn, "if by cutting off that right arm at the shoulder I could have saved a human life I'd have done it."

"And now," retorted Chester quickly, "now, two hours after — would you cut it off now?"

Red Pepper looked at him. The arm dropped. "No," said he, "I wouldn't. Not for a dozen lives like that. I'm not heroic, after all—only hot and cold by jumps, like a thermometer. But I ache all over, just the same. She runs like a bird now. Jump in—we'll take a spin and try her out on the road. I may need her before midnight."

Nothing loth, for he knew the Green Imp and her driver and had had many a swift run on a moonlight night before in the same company,

Chester took the slim roadster's other seat, watching the long green hood point the way down the driveway, past the porch where the women, in white gowns showing coolly in the light from the arc lamp at the corner of the street, called a good-bye.

"Back—some time," replied Chester's voice, rising above the low purr of the engine with a note of satisfaction in it. The figure beside him, still in open, white shirt, with bare arms and uncovered, thick thatch of red hair, did not turn its head.

"Arthur's never so happy as when he's out with Red in the Green Imp," Winifred said to her guest as the roadster shot away under the elms which drooped beneath the arc light.

"Doctor Burns is certainly the oddest man I ever saw," replied the guest, swinging idly in the hammock and watching the car out of sight down the long vista of the village street. "He hasn't given me one real good look yet. I suppose if I were a patient he would favour me with an all-seeing gaze out of those Irish-Scotch barbarian eyes of his, but as it is"—her voice was slightly petulant—"I believe I shall have to do as Arthur

has: make up some symptoms and go over to his office."

"If you do you'll get precisely the same treatment I presume Arthur had." Mrs. Chester laughed as she spoke. "I doubt very much whether he comes back with any headache medicine."

"But he got a moonlight ride in that beauty of a car," the guest declared enviously. "That treatment would suit me wonderfully well, whatever was the matter."

"Would you have gone with him in his shirt-sleeves? He's plainly in a shirt-sleeve mood to-night."

"I think a drive in the moonlight with a 'brute of a saint' in shirt-sleeves, with arms like those, might be interesting," mused the guest, indicating invisible patterns on the porch with the toe of a white slipper.

"He would probably talk cars and engines every mile in the most matter-of-fact way," Winifred Chester assured her. "No woman yet has ever been able, as far as this town knows, to strike a spark of romance out of Red Pepper Burns."

"Yet he has red hair," murmured the guest to herself, and continued to look thoughtfully down the street along which the Green Imp had shot out toward the open country beyond.

Out in that open country, miles away, the car running with that exquisite precision of rotating cylinder explosions which is music to the trained ear of the mechanic at the wheel, the two men sat silent. The pace of the Green Imp was one to cut off speech, for the road was straight and empty, stretching like a white ribbon under the stars, with now and then a band of midnight shade crossing it where arching tree-tops met—the course which invites an open throttle and the intent eye which goes with it.

Suddenly the car struck aside from the straight-away and with open cut-out roared up a steep hill by means of which a narrow road led off toward a part of the country not often selected by motorists for pleasure spins. Chester recognized that his companion had a purpose beyond that of "trying out" his engine, unless, indeed, the tough and rocky grade were a test. But Burns was still silent, and the other man applied himself to holding on. A mile up the road the

car came to an abrupt standstill before a tiny house.

"Going to make a call, after all?" was on Chester's lips, but the sight of something, showing white beside the door in the lamplight which streamed out upon a small, decrepit porch, drove back the words.

Burns left a silent engine and strode up the straggling path with the light tread of the heavy man whose muscles are under his control. He walked in at the open door without knocking, and Chester caught the sharp sound of a woman's voice at a tension, saying: "Oh, Doctor!"

It seemed to him an hour, though by his watch it was but nine minutes, that he sat watching the little flimsy streamer of white flutter to and fro in the lamplight, his heart beating heavily, as a father's will at sight of the sign of some other man's loss.

At the end of those interminable nine minutes Burns was back again in the car. He turned the Green Imp about as quietly as if she were a cat stealing out of the yard, and sent her down the rocky road at her slowest speed. At the bottom of the hill he broke the long silence.

"Couldn't have slept an hour if I hadn't come back," he said in a low tone. "Back and apologized for being a brute. It's eased me up a bit—I think it's eased her, too, poor soul."

"Then it wasn't losing the case——" Chester began doubtfully. He was never sure just when it was safe to ask Red Pepper questions, but he thought it seemed safer than usual now.

"No, it wasn't losing the case, though that was bad enough. It was losing my infernal hair-trigger of a temper that's been cutting in like a knife. I had the boy where he ought to get well—if they followed my precautions a thousand times repeated. This morning his heart was a whole lot stronger; it only needed time. To-night his mother let him sit up—in spite of all I'd threatened her with if she did. He went out like a snuffed candle. When I saw it I was so angry with her I"—he thrust up one hand and ran it through his thick locks with a gesture of savagery—"I let loose on her—poor soul—with her heart already broken. He was the only boy—of course . . . . I ought to have been shot on the spot."

He sent the car flying down the road. Chester

could think of nothing to say. He could imagine the sort of apology Red had given the boy's mother—one to make her forgive and adore him. No doubt it had "eased her." It must have been a hard thing for R. P. Burns, M.D., to do. Suddenly recalling this he said so, and added a word of admiration. Burns turned on him.

"Boy," he said, "I'm the toughest case on my list. I'm a chronic patient. Just as I think I have myself in hand I suffer a relapse. I break out in a new place. Of all men who need self-control, it's a surgeon needs it most. Sometimes, I'm in too much of a temper to operate—just because a nurse has failed to provide the right sutures. Every red hair on my head stands up like a porcupine's quills—my hand isn't steady—I can't trust my own judgment—till I've cooled down. There's only one hope for me——"

He broke off abruptly, and the Green Imp accelerated her pace as they came to the long, straight road home. Until they reached the turn under the elms which led to the town, he left the sentence unfinished, while Chester waited. Chester felt it would be worth waiting for—that which Red Pepper might say next. When it came it,

surprised him—it even gave him a strange thrill —coming from Red Pepper.

"I've put my case into the only competent hands," said Burns slowly and quite simply. "I've promised my Maker I'll never insult His name again."

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH HE CREATES A CIRCUS

"DOCTOR BURNS——"

"Yes, Miss Mathewson."

"The long-distance telephone, please."

Burns excused himself to the last patient of the evening series, and shut himself in with the long-distance. When he came out he was looking at his watch. From its face he turned to that of his office nurse—the one hardly less business-like in expression than the other.

"Miss Mathewson, my aunt telephones that my father and mother are both sick, each anxious to distraction about the other, she about them both, and under the weather herself. If you and I can catch the ten-fifteen to-night we can be there by two, and by leaving there at four we can be back here in time for the morning's operations. If they need you I'll leave you there for a day or two—by your leave. We'll take the Green Imp into the city—the ten-fifteen doesn't stop here.

Then it'll be at the hospital when we want it in the morning. You've twenty minutes to get ready."

"Very well, Doctor Burns."

The office bell rang. Burns fled toward the inner office. Miss Mathewson discovered the guest of the Chesters on the doorstep—all in white, with a face which usually stimulated interest wherever it was seen.

"May I see Doctor Burns just a minute—for Mr. Chester?" The caller took her cue cleverly from Miss Mathewson's face, which at the moment expressed schedules and engagements thick as blackberries in August. Burns, just closing the inner door, caught Chester's name. He pulled off his white office coat, slid into his gray tweed one, and opened the door.

"What can I do for Mr. Chester—in three minutes?" he inquired, coming forward. Miss Mathewson, aware of the shortness of time, vanished.

"Give me something for his headache, please," replied the young person in white promptly. Schedules and engagements were in R. P. Burns's eyes, also; they looked at her without appearing

to see her at all. To this she was not accustomed and it displeased her.

"Was it too severe for him to come himself?"

"Much too severe. He has gone to bed with it."

"Mrs. Chester closely attending him?"

"Certainly—or I shouldn't be here." The eyes of the Chesters' guest sparkled. Something about the cool tone of this question displeased her still more.

"Tell him to get up and go out and walk a mile, breathing deep all the way."

"No medicine?"

"Not a grain. He ought to know better than to ask."

"He does, I think. He suggested that possibly if I asked—— But I see for myself now that that wouldn't make the slightest difference."

"I'm glad your perceptions are so acute," replied Burns gravely.

"Are the three minutes up?" asked the caller.

He looked at his watch. "I think not quite.

Is there anything of importance to fill the one remaining?"

"Nothing whatever—except to mention your fee." The guest receded gracefully from the door.

"If the patient will follow directions I'll ask no fee. If he doesn't I'll exact one when I see him again. Forgive my haste, Miss—Halstead?"

"Hempstead," corrected the caller crisply. "Don't mention it, Doctor—Brown. Good night."

The Chesters' guest lingered on the porch before going in to report the failure of her mission. She was still lingering there when the Green Imp, carrying no open-shirted mechanic, but a properly clothed professional gentleman and a severely dressed professional lady, whirled away down the drive.

"He really was going somewhere in a hurry, then," admitted the guest. "In which case I can't be quite so offended. I wonder if that nurse enjoys her trips with him—when his mouth doesn't happen to be shut like a steel trap."

If she could have seen the pair on the train

which presently bore them flying away across the state, she would hardly have envied either of them. Between abstraction on the one side and reserve on the other, they exchanged less conversation than two strangers might have done. When Miss Mathewson's eyes drooped with weariness her companion made her as comfortable as he could and bade her rest. His own eyes were untouched by slumber: he stared straight before him or out into the night, seeing nothing but a white farmhouse far ahead, where his anxious thoughts were waiting for his body to catch up.

"Are they much sick, Zeke?"

"Wal, I dunno hardly, Red.—You goin' to drive? They're pretty lively, them blacks. Ain't used to comin' to the station at two o'clock in the mornin'.—Your ma's been worryin' about your pa for a consid'able spell, and now that she's took down so severe herself he's gone to pieces some. Miss Ellen'll be glad to see you."

The blacks covered the mile from the station as they had never covered it before, and Burns was in the house five minutes before they had expected him.

"Mother, here's your big boy.—Dad, here I am—here's Red. Bless your hearts—you wanted me, didn't you?"

They could hardly tell him how they had wanted him, but he saw it in their faces.

"I've got to take the four o'clock back—worse luck!—for some operations I can't postpone. But between now and then I'm going to look you over and set you straight, and I'll be back again in two days if you need me. Now for it. Mother first. Come here, Aunt Ellen, and tell me all about her."

R. P. Burns, M.D., had never been quicker nor more thorough at examination of a pair of patients than with these. He went straight at them both, each in the presence of the other, Miss Mathewson capably assisting. With his most professional air he asked his questions, applied his trained senses to the searching tests made of special organs, and gave directions for future treatment. Then he sat back and looked at them.

"Do I appear worried about her, Dad?"

"Why, you don't seem to, Red."

"Miss Mathewson, should you gather from

my appearance that I am consumed with anxiety?"

"I think you seem very much relieved, Doctor Burns."

"Mother, as you look at Dad over on the couch there, does he strike you as appearing like a frightfully sick man?"

Mrs. Burns smiled faintly in the direction of the couch, but her eyes came immediately back to her son's. "He seems a good deal better since you came, Redfield."

"There's not a thing the matter with either of you except what can be fixed up in a week. You've got scared to death about each other, and that's pulled you both down. What you need more than anything else is to go to a circus—and, by George! —since I didn't observe any tents in the darkness as we drove along, you shall have one come to you. Look here! Did you know I'd kept up my old athletic stunts these nine years since I left college?"

He pulled off his coat, waistcoat, collar, shoes, rolled his shirt-sleeves as high as they would go, and turned a series of handsprings across the wide room. Then he stood on his head; he bal-

anced chairs on his chin; he seized his father's hickory stick and went through a set of military evolutions. Then he put on his shoes, eyeing his patients with satisfaction. His mother had lifted her head to watch him, and Miss Mathewson had tucked an extra pillow under it. His father had drawn himself up to half-sitting posture and was regarding his son with pride.

"I never thought so well of those doings before," he was saying. "If they've kept you as supple as a willow, in spite of your weight, I should say you'd better keep 'em up."

"You bet I will!—See here, Aunt Ellen—you used to play the 'Irish Washerwoman.' Mind playing it now? Miss Mathewson and I are going to do a cakewalk."

He glanced, laughing, at his office nurse. She was staring at him wide-eyed. He threw back his head, showing a splendid array of white teeth as he roared at her expression.

"Forget *'Doctor Burns,'* please," said he, in answer to the expression. "He's discharged this case as not serious enough for him, and left it to Red Pepper to administer a few gentle stimulants on the quack order. Come! You can do a cake-

walk! Forget you're a graduate of any training school but the vaudeville show!"

He caught her hand. Flushing so that her plain face became almost pretty, she yielded—for the hand was insistent. Miss Ellen leaned bewildered against the door which led to the sitting-room where the old piano stood. Her nephew looked at her again, with the eyes which the Chesters' guest had somewhat incoherently described as "Irish-Scotch-barbarian." He said, "Please, Aunt Ellen, there's a good fellow," at which Mr. Burns, Senior, chuckled under his breath; for anything less like that of a "good fellow" was never seen than Sister Ellen's prim little personality. Miss Ellen went protestingly to the piano. Was it right, her manner said, to be performing in this idiotic manner at this unholy hour of three o'clock in the morning—*in a sick-room?*

It mattered little whether Miss Mathewson could or could not dance the "Irish Washerwoman," or any other antic dance improvised to that live air; she had only to yield herself to Red Pepper Burns's hands and steps, and let him disport himself around her. A most startlingly hilarious performance was immediately and effectively

produced. At the height of it, a door across the sitting-room, which commanded a strip of the bedroom beyond, opened cautiously and Zeke Crandall's eye glued itself to the aperture, an eye astonished beyond belief.

"If that there Red ain't a-cuttin' up jest exactly as he used to when he was a boy—and his pa and ma sick a-bed! If 'twas anybody but Red I'd say he was crazy."

Then he caught the sound of a laugh from lips he had not heard laugh like that for a year—a chuckling, delighted laugh, only slightly asthmatic and wholly unrestrained. He began to laugh himself.

"If folks round here could see Red Burns now they'd never believe the stories about his gettin' to be such a darned successful man at his business," he reflected. "Of all the goin's on! Look at him now! An' that nurse! An' Miss Ellen a-playin' for 'em! Oh, my eye!"

Songs followed—college songs, popular airs, opera bits—all delivered in a resounding baritone and accompanied by thumping chords improvised by the performer. Out through the open windows they floated, and one astonished villager

driving by to take the early train caught the exultant strains:

"Oh, see dat watermillion a-smilin' fro' de fence,
How I wish dat watermillion it was mine.
Oh, de white folks must be foolish,
Dey need a heap of sense,
Or dey'd nebber leave it dar upon de vine!
Oh, de ham-bone am sweet,
An' de bacon am good,
An' de 'possum fat am berry, berry fine;
But gib me, yes, gib me,
Oh, how I wish you would,
Dat watermillion growin' on de vine!"

Before they knew it the early morning light was creeping in at the small-paned windows. Burns consulted his watch.

"If you'll give us a cup of coffee, Aunt Ellen, we'll be off in fifteen minutes. Miss Mathewson"—his glance mirthfully surveyed her—"Aunt Ellen will take you upstairs and give you a chance to put that magnificent brown hair into a condition where it will not shock the natives at the station. As for mine——"

When Aunt Ellen and Miss Mathewson, each in her own way feeling as if she had passed through an extraordinary experience likely never

to occur again, had hurried away, Burns applied himself to a process of reconstruction. When every rebellious red hair had been reduced to its usual order and his thick locks lay with the little wave in them as his mother had begun to brush them years ago; when collar and cravat rose sedately above the gray tweed coat, and a fresh, fine handkerchief had replaced the dingy one which had been through every manner of exercise in the "circus," Burns drew up a chair and faced his patients with the keen, professional gaze which told him whether or not his night's work had been good therapeutics.

"When I've gone you're to have breakfast, and I think you'll both eat it," he said, smiling at them, his eyes bright with affection and contentment. "Then you're to compose yourselves for sleep, and I think you'll both sleep. To-morrow Dad's to be out on the porch—all June is out there, and the roses are in full bloom. Day after to-morrow Mother'll be there, too, in the hammock. As soon as these cases I operate on this morning are out of danger I'll be down again for a whole day. I'll keep the time clear."

"I'm afraid," said his father, looking suddenly

anxious for a new cause, "your being up all night won't make your hand any steadier for those operations, Red."

"On the contrary, as a matter of fact, Dad, it'll be a lot steadier just because of my being up all night, assuring myself that there's nothing serious the matter with you and Mother, except the need of a bit of jollying by your boy—which you've certainly had right off the reel, eh? Aunt Ellen thinks yet I've probably killed you. Are you the worse for it, Mother? Give it to me straight, now!"

He bent over her, his fingers on her delicate wrist. She smiled up into his eyes. "Redfield!" she murmured. "As if I could ever be the worse for having you come home!"

He dropped on his knees beside the bed, looking at her with the eyes of the boy she had borne. "Bless me, Mother," he said unsteadily, all the fun gone out of his face. "I—need it—to keep decent."

The last three words were under his breath, but she heard the others and laid her hand on the red head with a tremulous soft word or two which he could barely catch.

In a minute he had risen, his cheek flushed high, and was gripping his father's hand. "You, too, Dad," he begged. "I'm only Red this morning—going back into the world."

His father's hand and voice shook as he administered the little ceremony, used only once before in his son's life—when at fourteen he first went away to school. Few grown men would have asked for it again, he felt that. Coming from Red he was sure the request meant more than they could know.

Then the professional gentleman whom the world knew—the world which was not acquainted with Red Pepper Burns—and the professional lady who was his assistant went decorously away into the early June morning. Zeke was grinning to himself as he saw them step aboard the train.

"Looks mighty fine in them clipper-built city clothes, Red does," he reflected. "If that there young woman chose to give him away, now—but I kind of guess she won't—under the circumstances!"

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH HE ASSUMES A RESPONSIBILITY

"RED, the new car is here. Come and look her over."

It was Burns's neighbour on the other side, James Macauley, Junior. R. P. Burns laid down his saw, with which in the late June twilight he had been doing vigorous work at a small woodpile behind the house. He stood up straight, throwing back his shoulders to take the kink out of them.

"All right," said he. "I think I'm fit for general society again. I wasn't when I tackled this job. Nothing like fifteen minutes of woodpile for taking the temper out of the saw—and the man."

Macauley, a stout, good-humoured fellow of thirty-five, laughed. "That temper of yours, Red—has it been on the rampage again?"

"It has. Don't talk about it or it'll lift its confounded red head again—it's only scotched for the present. New car's here, eh?"

"Yes, and the pretty widow's here, too—my wife's sister, Ellen Lessing. We've a great plan for to-morrow, Red. I can't venture to drive this elephant of a car yet, but the women are wild for a trip in her. She holds seven. Martha wants you to drive us and the Chesters to-morrow a hundred and fifty miles—seventy-five to F —— and back. Will you do it? You're not so horribly busy just now, and Mrs. Lessing and Pauline Hempstead together ought to make it worth while for you."

This feature of the invitation did not appear to appeal to Burns, but the sight of the touring car, brave and shining in russet and brass, plainly did.

"Not that I'd care to drive such a whale for myself, but I shouldn't mind a run for the fun of trying her out. You say she's been driven enough to warm up her engines? Suppose we take her out and let me get the feel of her mouth before to-morrow?"

"Come on." And they were off.

"For a whale she's a bird," was Burns's paradoxical verdict two hours later. The "trying out" had merged into a smooth run of forty-five miles at not anything like the full pace of which the

motor was capable. "Best not to overheat her at first. Run your first three hundred miles with consideration for her vital organs—she'll have her wind by that time."

Next morning four women, long-coated, tissue-veiled, watched the brown beauty roll invitingly up to Macauley's porch steps.

As she crossed the lawn with Winifred, Pauline Hempstead, the guest of the Chesters, was studying not only the car, but the undeniably attractive gray-clad figure of the lately-arrived younger sister of Mrs. Macauley. "Will Red P. look at her any more than he does at me?" she murmured in Winifred Chester's ear.

"I doubt it, my dear. But he'll be foolish if he doesn't, won't he?"

"I don't care for widows myself."

"I presume not." Winifred laughed comprehendingly.

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-eight, I believe—though she doesn't look it."

"Doesn't look it! She looks a lot more."

Winifred laughed still, quietly. Although Pauline undoubtedly had the advantage of Ellen in

years, her fair-haired, blue-eyed, somewhat sumptuous beauty was not of so youthful a type as the darker colouring and slenderer outlines of Martha's sister.

The man at the wheel of the brown car lifted his leather cap as the women came out, but he left all the bestowal of them to the other men. Miss Hempstead asked to be allowed to sit beside the driver, but Macauley vowed that on the first long run of his new machine he himself should occupy that post of honour and interest.

"Coming back, then," insisted the girl, and Macauley agreed reluctantly. Burns made no comment, but applied himself to his task—not only then, but also for every minute of the seventy-five miles to their destination.

"He might as well be a hired chauffeur," complained Miss Hempstead when, during a stop of ten minutes on account of a switching freight train, she had leaned forward and attempted in vain to carry on a conversation with Burns. "That abstracted mood of his—is there any breaking into it?"

"Fall out and break your collar-bone. He'll be all attention," advised Chester.

"Thank you. I'm almost tempted to. Why don't you drive awhile, Mr. Macauley, and give him a rest?"

"And let him sit here in the middle with you? He couldn't be pried loose from that wheel now. Besides, I haven't driven this car yet, and she's too different in her steering from my old one. I shouldn't like to try with this crowd behind me."

They reached the distant city; drew up at the steps of the most attractive hotel; went in to lunch. That is to say, all did this except R. P. Burns. He remained in the garage in the rear where he had taken the car, busying himself with some details of mechanism whose working did not quite suit him. In spite of summons and appeals he continued to work until the rest had finished; then he bolted in to wash off dust and engine grease, ate his lunch in ten minutes—Macauley sitting by and expostulating—and bolted out again.

"We're going to walk about a bit," Chester announced, invading the garage. "The girls insist that you come. Where are your eyes, man? If Pauline bores you—I admit that she's a trifle

persistent, but she's jolly good company, *I* think —try Mrs. Lessing. She's delightful, and not the pursuing style at all—she's learned better. She hasn't shown the slightest interest in you all morning. That ought to attract you."

"I'm going to try a bit of adjustment on this timer—now that Mac's out of the way. Go along, and don't bother me." Burns was in his shirt-sleeves again and spoke gruffly. His cap was off, and thick locks lay damply against his moist brow; in his eyes sparkled enthusiasm—but not for women.

"You certainly are a hopeless case," and Chester went back to his party.

"We might as well not have a bachelor along," mourned Pauline. "Four women—with only two old married men to look after them—it's a shame."

"But we're both of us much handsomer than Red Pepper Burns," asserted James Macauley, Junior. "And I've hardly spoken a word to my wife since I started—that sort of thing ought to content you."

"It doesn't. And neither of you is half as good-looking as Doctor Burns. He has the most

interesting profile I ever saw—and I ought to know—I seldom catch sight of his full face."

"I shouldn't suppose an interesting profile, whatever that is, would offset a shock of fire-red hair. Now, both Chester's hair and mine——"

"His hair isn't fire-red. It's a—rather strong—auburn."

Macauley shouted and the rest laughed with him.

"Rather strong! I should say it was. I've been worried about having him sit near the gasoline tank, it brings his hair so close to a high combustible. But it has one advantage: if we don't get home before dark we shan't need to light up. Red's torch of a head will do the trick; we can come in by the refulgence from that."

"I shall be sitting in its light going back, anyhow," Miss Hempstead exulted.

"Much good it will do you," prophesied Chester.

It did Pauline so much good as that she was able to obtain many looks at the profile she admired, for she saw it clean-cut against the passing landscape for the sixty miles of daylight out of the seventy-five miles home, while she sat beside

its owner and tried many times to draw him into talk. His taciturnity on this particular day was a thing beyond any experience with it she had yet had. She had heard Burns talk, and talk well, on many different subjects, the while he sat upon the Chesters' porch of a summer evening, the three of them about him, and he had seemed to enjoy talking. He certainly could not be wholly occupied with the machine, for at no time did he let the engine out for what it could do, but contented himself with a steady, moderate pace very different from the sort of furious speed in which he and the Green Imp were accustomed to indulge when occasion offered. Altogether he presented to the girl a problem which she could not solve and was never further from solving than during the seventy-five miles she sat beside him on the run home.

"You're all to come in and have an ice-cool, salad-y supper with us," Mrs. Macauley declared as the car turned in at the home driveway. "Hot coffee, too, if you want it—or even beefsteak if you prefer. But I thought since it was so hot——"

"I'll take the beefsteak," announced Burns

over his shoulder, "if I find nothing urgent for me to do. If there's a call——"

"If there is, make it, and you shall have the beefsteak when you get back," Martha promised him. Mrs. Macauley was of the sort of young married woman who delights to make her friends comfortable—and none better than Red Pepper, who was her husband's most valued friend, as he was that of his neighbour on the other side, Arthur Chester.

To everybody's regret the call was waiting, and as the party went in to supper they waved their hands at the Green Imp flying away down the road. It was not till long after the "ice-cool, salad-y supper" was ended and the women, freshly clad, were sitting on the porch again, the men smoking on the steps below them, that the Green Imp came back.

Ten minutes later a large figure crossed the lawn at a pace which suggested both reluctance and fatigue.

"If it hadn't been for that beefsteak——" Burns began.

"You wouldn't have come," finished Macauley. "Oh, we know that! Go in and get it, Red, and

perhaps afterward the charms of human society will have their inning."

Whether or not the beefsteak made the difference, a change had taken place when R. P. Burns at length returned to the comforts of the porch. He threw himself upon a crimson cushion on the upper step, precisely at the feet, as it chanced, of Ellen Lessing. As he leaned comfortably back against the porch pillar he looked directly up into her face, his eyes meeting hers with an odd, searching expression as if he now saw her for the first time. Pauline, gazing enviously across, saw the black eyes meet the hazel ones in the dim light, and noted that a curiously long look was exchanged—the sort of look which denotes that two people are observing each other closely, without attempt at producing an impression, only at discovering what is there.

But when Burns began to talk he appeared to address the midsummer night air, staring off into it and speaking rather low, so that they all leaned forward to listen. For, at last, he seemed to have something other than motor cars upon his mind.

"He's a mighty taking little chap," he said musingly. "Curly black hair, eyes like coals—

with a fringe around 'em like a hedge. Cheeks none too round—but milk and eggs and good red steaks will take care of that. A body like a cherub's—when it's filled out a bit."

"What in the name of gibberish are you giving us, Red?" inquired Macauley.

"Name's 'Bob,'" went on Red Pepper. "By all the odd chances! That's what decided me. 'Bobby Burns'—it was the last straw!"

"Is he crazy?" asked Chester of the company. They seemed undecided. They were listening closely.

"Clothes—one pair of patched breeches—remember 'Little Breeches,' Ches?—one faded flannel shirt—mended till there wasn't much left to mend. A straw hat with a fringe around it—uneven fringe. Inside—a heartache as big as a little fellow could carry and stagger under it. Think of having the heartache—at five—and for your grandmother!"

"Why for his grandmother?" asked Winifred Chester.

"Because there wasn't anybody else to have it for. Rest all gone, grandmother the one who mended the breeches and patched the shirt, and

went without food herself lest the boy's cheeks get thinner yet. That was what fixed her at last —she hadn't enough vitality to pull her through."

"So that was the matter with you to-day," hazarded Chester. "Worried about your patient all day and found you'd lost her when you got back?"

Burns turned upon him with a characteristic flash. "You go join the ranks of the snap-shots. They sometimes miss fire. No, I didn't. I'd lost her before I went or I wouldn't have gone, not for you or any other box-party. It was the kiddie that was on my mind—as I'd seen him last."

"Where is he now?" asked Martha Macauley urgently. She was the mother of two small sons, and Burns's sketch had interested her.

He looked up at her. "Want to see him?"

"Of course I do. Did you take him to somebody in town? Are you going to send him to the asylum in the city?"

"Do you want to see him?" Burns inquired of Winifred Chester. He rose.

"Red! What do you mean? Have you got a child here?"

"Come along, all of you, if you like. He won't wake up. He's sleeping like a top—can't help it, with all that bread and milk inside of him. Part cream it was, too. I saw Cynthia chucking it in. He'd got her, good and plenty, in the first five minutes. Bless her susceptible heart! Come on."

"Talk of susceptible hearts," jeered Macauley as he followed. "There's the softest one in the county."

"Nobody would ever guess it," murmured Pauline Hempstead.

They tiptoed into the house, across the offices into the big, square room which was Burns's own. He switched on a hooded reading-light beside the bed and turned it so that its rays fell on the small occupant.

He lay in spread-eagle, small-child fashion, arms and legs thrown wide, the black, curly head disdaining the pillow, one fist clutching a man's riding-crop. In sleep the little face was an exquisite one; the onlookers might guess what it would be awake.

Burns pointed at the crop, smiling. "That was the nearest approach to a plaything I could

muster to-night. To-morrow the shops will help me out."

"I'll send over plenty in the morning, Red," whispered Martha Macauley. Her eyes were suspiciously shiny.

"Did you bring him home just now?" questioned Winifred.

Burns nodded. "I hadn't meant to get him to-night, if I did at all. My call took me within half a mile. I went over and saw him again. That settled it."

The small sleeper stirred, sighed. Burns turned off the light in a twinkling. "He's not used to electricity point blank," he chuckled.

Going down the steps a hand touched his arm. He looked into Ellen Lessing's upturned face and discovered anew that it was a face to hold the attention of a man. But there was no coquetry in it. Instead, he saw a stirred look in eyes which struck him suddenly as singularly like those of the child he had just shown her, "black, with a fringe around 'em."

"Doctor Burns," she said, "will you give me the very great pleasure of dressing the boy? I know how to do it."

"Of course, if you want to," he responded gladly. "I hoped you ladies would look after that."

"Let me do it alone," she urged. "They have their children: it would only be a task to them. To me—I can't tell you what a delight it would be."

"I'll take you and Bob to the city in the morning if you'll go."

"It will be a happy morning for Bob and me, then," she answered, and he saw it in her face that it would be. But he felt that it was because of the boy; not for any other reason. It occurred to him that it might possibly be a happy morning for the driver of the Green Imp, also.

"So Ellen's going to dress the brat." Macauley was strolling over the lawn with Chester and Burns, as, having out-sat the women on the Macauley porch, the men were turning bedward, reluctant to leave the cool starshine of the July night. "It's easy to see why she wants to do that. Her three-year-old boy would have been just about this Bob's age by now. Tough luck, wasn't it?—when he was all she had left since Jack got out of the game?"

Burns stared at him. "Oh, that's why? I didn't know about her boy, or I'd forgotten it if I was ever told. She will enjoy fitting Bob out, if I can keep her from putting him into white clothes to make him resemble an angel instead of a small boy with an eye for dirt."

"You'll find Ellen's no fool," Macauley assured him warmly. "But if she takes an interest in the boy it'll be the best thing that could happen to him. She has a lot of money. She may get a notion to adopt him."

But upon this Red Pepper Burns spoke with decision. "Confound you, the kiddie belongs to me. Didn't I tell you his name is now Robert Burns? She may dress him if she likes. She can't have him, not by a long shot. He's *mine!*"

"Oh, well, it might be arranged," murmured Macauley, but not quite low enough. In a flash he was laid flat on his back on the lawn, a menacing figure standing over him.

"None of that!" growled the man with the temper. "Not now or any other time." Then he laughed and let his victim up. "Alcohol will take out grass stains, Jim," he advised. "Tell Martha that."

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH HE MAKES A CONCESSION

RED PEPPER BURNS opened his eyes. What on earth was that? A small voice piping at him from within close range? But how could that be?

Something bumped against him. He turned his head on his pillow. A small figure at his side had raised itself upon its elbow; big black eyes in a pale little face were staring at him in affright. Burns roused himself, suddenly very wide awake indeed.

"It's all right, little man," said he, pulling the child gently into the warmth of his encircling arm. "You came home with me last night. Don't you remember? You're going to make me a visit. And this morning after breakfast we're going to drive to town and buy a train of cars—red, shiny cars and an engine with a bell on it. What do you think of that?"

It did not take long to change Bob's fright into

the happiest anticipations. Red Pepper Burns was at his best with children; he had what their mothers called "a way with them."

A knock at the door and Cynthia's voice calling, "Here's some things for the little boy, Doctor," put an end to a full half-hour of delightful comradeship, during which the sheets of the bed had became a tent and the two were soldiers resting after a day's march. Burns rose and took in the parcel. Martha Macauley had sent it. Her boy Harold was the nearest in size to Bob of any of the children of his neighbours, and the parcel held everything needed from undershirt to scarlet Windsor scarf to tie under the rolling collar of the blue blouse.

"A bath first, Bob," and his new guardian initiated him into the exciting experience of a splash in a big white tub, in water decidedly warmer than it would be a week hence when he should have become used to the invigorating cool plunge. Then Burns, glowing from contact with water as cold as it could be got from the tap, clad in bathrobe and slippers, attempted to solve the mysteries of Bob's toilet. Roars of laughter interspersed with high pipings of glee presently brought Cynthia to the door.

"Can't I help you, Doctor Burns?" she called anxiously.

"Not a bit of it, Cynthia: much obliged. I'm having the time of my life. Stand still, son; let's try it this way round!" came back to the housekeeper's ears.

"I ain't never wore so many fings before," Bob declared doubtfully, as a small white waist with dangling elastic stocking-supporters was finally discovered to go best buttoned in the back.

"I know. But you'll see how fine it is to have your stockings held up for you. Hi! Here are some sandals, Bob! Barefoot sandals, only we'll wear them over stockings to-day, since we're going shopping. Now for these blue garments—I wonder how they go. Shapeless-looking things, they look to me. I suppose they'll resolve into baggy knickers and the sort of long shirt with a belt to it the youngsters of your age all wear. Here we go. Does this top part button behind, Bob, like the waist? No, I think not. . . . It sure looks odd, whichever way we don it, but that may be because it's pretty big. Harold's several sizes bigger than you, though he can't be much older. Give me six months and

I'll have you filling out any other five-year-old's clothes."

"My hands—they're all gone," remarked the child, holding out his arms. The blue sleeves did, indeed, cover them to the finger-tips. Laughing, Burns rolled the cloth back, making an awkward bunch at the wrist, but allowing the small hands freedom.

"When Mrs. Lessing trains her eye on you she'll want to make time getting to the shops," Burns observed, struggling with the scarlet scarf and finally tying it like a four-in-hand. "But you're clean, Bob, and hungry, I hope. Now I want a great big hug to pay me for dressing you."

He held out his arms, and his new charge sprang into them, pressing arms like sticks around the strong neck of the man who seemed to him already the best friend he had in the world—as he was.

At eleven o'clock, a round of calls made, the Green Imp came for Bob and Mrs. Lessing. They met him, hand in hand, the little figure in its voluminous misfit clothes looking quaint enough beside the perfect outlines of his companion's attire. But both faces were very happy

"How many dollars do you suppose Ellen has stowed away in that handsome purse of hers, ready to spend on the child?" Martha Macauley queried of Winifred Chester as they watched the Green Imp out of sight from the Macauley porch.

Mrs. Chester shook her head. "I've no idea. She'll want to get him everything a child could have. But Red won't let her."

"He won't know. He'll drop them at a store and go off to the hospital. The things will come home by special delivery, and the next thing he sees will be Bob in silk socks and white linen."

"I don't believe it. He'll go shopping with them. He's wild over the boy, and he doesn't care a straw what people might think who saw the three together. He'll tyrannize over Ellen—and she'll let him, for the pleasure of being ruled by a man once more!"

It was a shrewd prophecy and goes to show that women really understand each other pretty well —women of the same sort. For Red Pepper Burns did go shopping with the pair from start to finish. It was an experience he did not see any occasion for missing.

"You won't mind my coming, too?" was all

the permission he asked, and Mrs. Lessing answered simply: "Surely not, if you care to. We shall want your judgment."

She had not conducted them to a department store, but to the small shop of a decidedly exclusive children's outfitter. Burns knew nothing about the presumably greater cost of buying a wardrobe in a place like this, but he soon scented danger. He scrutinized certain glass showcases containing wax lay-figures of pink-cheeked youngsters attired as for the stage, and boomed his first caution into his companion's ear.

"That's not the sort of puppet we want to make out of Bob, eh?" he suggested.

She turned, smiling. "Not unless you intend to keep him in a glass case, Doctor Burns."

"No long-trousered imitation of a sailor-boy, either, please," said he, pointing, disfavour in his eye, at the presentment of a curly-headed infant of five in a Jack-tar outfit of white flannel topped by an expensive straw hat.

"I see you're not going to trust me," murmured Mrs. Lessing, as a slim-waisted, trailing-black-gowned saleswoman approached.

"I'll trust you, but I intend to keep my eye on

you," admitted Burns frankly. He observed with interest the wonderful figure of the saleswoman. Quite possibly that lady thought he was admiring her, for nothing in his face could have told her that he was mapping out in his surgeon's mind her physical anatomy, and speculating as to where in the name of Hygeia she could have disposed of her digestive organs in a circumference the diminutive size of that!

Underwear first. Mrs. Lessing went straight at the foundations of Bob's make up, and began to look over boxes of little gossamer shirts and tiny union suits of a fabric so delicately fine that Burns handled a fold of it suspiciously.

"Silk?" he questioned.

She shook her head, the corners of her mouth curving. "Only a thread now and then. Mostly lisle—for very hot weather. These others have some wool in them, for cooler days. Those nearest you are quite warm, though very light in weight. For really cold weather——"

"You're not planning to watch the thermometer and keep him changing underwear accordingly?"

"Not at all, Doctor Burns. But four weights for the year aren't too many, are they?"

"Are you buying for a year ahead?"

"Please let me. I shall not be here when he needs to change."

Their eyes met. Something in hers made him desist from argument.

Stockings came next. Mrs. Lessing bought substantial tan ones in quantity, long and well reënforced. Then she took up socks of russet and of white. "Shall you object to his wearing these a good deal?" she asked Burns. He took up one small sample, running his fingers into it. "I should think he might put his toes through one of those in an hour or two," he suggested. "His legs are pretty thin. Do you think pipe-stem legs in short socks, to say nothing of bruises and scratches, really attractive?"

"You want him to go barefooted a good deal of the time, don't you?"

"Sure. But legs in socks are neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring, to my thinking."

In spite of the smile on his lips, he looked obstinate and she deliberated, drawing a white sock unmistakably fine and expensive over her gray-gloved hand. Plainly she wanted to see Bob in socks and strap slippers, of the sort her boy would have worn. As she studied the sock Burns

studied her profile. "Get him a pair, for your own satisfaction," he conceded.

He did not hear the order she gave, but the saleswoman was pleasantly smiling as she checked it.

The next thing that happened, Bob was being measured. Then he was trying on Russian blouse suits that fitted, practical little garments of blue galatea, of tan-coloured linen crash, even of brown holland. Burns looked on approvingly. The clothes turned Bob into a gentleman's son, no doubt of that, but it was the sort of gentleman's son who can have the very best of romping, good times.

Something diverted Burns's attention for a little, and when he turned back to Bob a bright scarlet reefer had been pulled on over his blouse, and a wide sailor hat with a scarlet ribbon crowned his black curls. The result was engagingly picturesque. But the critic frowned.

"I'm afraid that won't do, Mrs. Lessing," he objected decidedly.

"You don't like the colour? Not with his hair and eyes?"

"It won't hurt his hair, but it will his eyes. The sun on that red will torture him."

"Will it? I shouldn't have thought of it. So many children wear them."

"And shortly come to spectacles. Try it yourself for half an hour."

She drew off the reefer. Bob objected. "I like the red jacky, Dotter Burns," he said. It was his first comment. Hitherto he had been in a dazed state, submitting wonderingly to this strange experience.

Another small coat of tan-coloured cloth with a gorgeous red-and-brown emblem on the sleeve consoled him.

"I think we are through," said Mrs. Lessing. Burns looked at her.

"No white clothes?" he asked.

"Did you want him to have some?"

"No. But I thought you would."

"I have ordered three suits to be made for him," she admitted, flushing a little. "They will be very plain and will launder beautifully. He will wear them only on special occasions. Do you mind?"

"Well, not on those conditions," he agreed reluctantly.

They went to a shoe shop, and Bob became

the richer for leather sandals, canvas shoes, and various other footwear, some of it undeniably fine. Burns took one little black slipper into his hand.

"I wonder what Bob's grandmother would say to that," he observed in a whisper.

Ellen Lessing regarded its mate. Her lashes hid her eyes, but her lip quivered and he saw it. The salesman was busy with Bob. Burns laid his hand for an instant on hers. She looked up, and a smile struggled with the tears.

A toy shop came last. Here Bob was in an ecstasy. His companions walked up and down the aisles, following his eager steps. Mrs. Lessing would have filled his arms, but she found the way obstructed.

"He may have the train of cars," Burns consented. "But they must be cars he'll have to pull about for himself. No, not the trotting horse, nor the trolley on the track, nor any other of the mechanical stuff. I'll get him that dandy little tool-chest and that box of building blocks, but that's enough."

"The mechanical toys are of the best, sir," suggested the salesman. "They won't break except with pretty rough handling."

"That's bad," Burns asserted. "The quicker they broke, the less objection I'd have to 'em. It's a wonder the modern child has a trace of resource or inventiveness left in him. Teach him to construct, not to destroy, then you've done something for him."

"Isn't he rather young for tools?" Mrs. Lessing was turning over a small saw in her hands, feeling its sharp teeth with a premonitory finger.

"There are gauze and bandages in the office." He laughed at her expression as she laid down the saw.

"You won't object to that box of tin soldiers?" she asked.

"Decidedly. You don't want to spoil him at the start. For a boy who never had a toy in his life he's acquired enough now to turn his head. Come away, Mrs. Lessing—flee temptation. Come, Bobby boy." And Burns led the way.

Bob, astride of a marvellous rocking-horse taller than himself, was like to weep. Mrs. Lessing went to him. He whispered something in her ear. She came back to Burns.

"Doctor Burns," said she, "every boy has a rocking-horse. He's just the age to enjoy it.

Surely it won't hazard his inventiveness: it will develop it. He'll ride all over the country, as you do in the Green Imp."

"What's the price?"

"It's not costly and it's a very good one."

Burns inquired the price again; this time he asked the salesman. Then he spoke low:

"Fifteen dollars seems 'not costly' to you, I suppose. Think of Bob yesterday, with not a toy to his name."

"That's why I want to give him one to-day."

"He'll be just as happy riding a stick—as soon as he forgets this."

"He won't forget it. Look at his eyes."

"You're looking at his eyes all the time. That's what undoes you."

He had to look away from her eyes then himself, or he felt quite suddenly that he, too, would have been undone. He had resisted the entreaty in women's eyes many times, but not always, despite the reputation he held for indifference.

"Doctor Burns, won't you give me this one pleasure? You've really been quite firm all the morning."

She was smiling, but he had himself in hand

again and he was blunt with her. "Bob's a bachelor's child now," he said. "He must be trained according to bachelors' ideas. Come, you know it's out of reason to give the youngster any more to-day. Be sensible."

They followed him out of the store, Bob's hand held fast in hers. Somehow, they both looked very young as they stood outside the shop window, gazing back at the marvellous display within. He felt as if he were being rather cruel to them both. This was absurd, of course, when one considered the box of blocks, the train of cars and the tool-kit. The child had enough playthings already to send him out of his head. Burns drove away rapidly to get out of range of other windows which seemed filled with rocking-horses to-day.

He looked down at Bob.

"Happy, little chap?" he asked.

Bob nodded. His arms clasped the red train, but he was not looking at it.

"Like the cars?"

Bob nodded. His wide sailor hat obscured his face. Burns could see only the tip of the small nose.

"You'll have a splendid time with those blocks, won't you?"

Again the nod, but no reply.

"The hammer's pretty nice, too, isn't it?"

Once more the dumb answer. But the silence seemed odd, for Bob had long since lost his fear of these companions.

"Look up here, Bob."

Reluctantly the child obeyed. Burns caught one fleeting glimpse of wet black lashes. One big tear was slowly stealing down the pale little cheek.

"What's the matter, old man?"

No reply.

Burns looked at Ellen Lessing behind Bob's back. She did not meet his glance. She was looking at the boy. It struck him that her profile made the most enchanting outline he had ever seen. He tried to steel his heart against them both. He knew his theory was right; he now had the chance to put it into practice.

The Green Imp turned a corner to the right. They were not yet out of the city, and at the next block the car turned another corner, also to the right. At the end of another block the Imp swerved once more—to the right. This brought them back to the wide street which led to the

shopping district they had lately left. With silent passengers the Imp threaded its way to the toy shop. In front of it Burns stopped the car. He got out and went in and came out, the big rocking-horse in the arms of the salesman who followed him.

He looked up at their faces. Bob's was one wide-eyed countenance of incredulous joy. The other's—if he had seen there satisfaction at having brought a man to terms he felt he should have despised her; but that was not what he saw.

There was, by planning carefully, just room to wedge the rocking-horse in at Mrs. Lessing's feet without encroaching on the steering-gear. As they drove off, Bob was bending over and gently stroking the animal's splendid black mane, with little chuckles and gurgles of joy. Once more Burns looked at Ellen Lessing behind Bob's back.

"You're happy now, aren't you?" he asked in a tone of assurance. "Then, confound it, I must own I'm paid for letting my wise bachelor notions go hang, just for this time!"

"Thank you," she answered very gently. "And I'm paid for trying to be reasonable."

He laughed, suddenly content. Between them

the little lad who had never owned a toy in his life, stowing the red train carefully away between his feet, gave himself wholly to the rocking-horse.

"Well, Ellen," was Martha Macauley's greeting to her sister, "did you have as interesting a time dressing the child as you expected?"

"I had a charming time," replied Mrs. Lessing. She shook the dust out of her long gray veil, smiling at her memory of the morning.

"Did R. P. prove docile?"

"'Docile' doesn't seem to me just the word."

"I used it in an attempt at fine irony," explained Mrs. Macauley.

"Well, was he tractable, then?"

"He was very polite and kind and jolly—until the real business of shopping began. Then he became suspicious—and a trifle autocratic." She recalled his look as he told her that he would trust her, but that he meant to keep an eye upon her.

"Didn't you get your own way about anything?" demanded her sister, with eager curiosity.

Ellen looked at her. Martha noted that the soft black eyes were glowing, and that she had not

seen Ellen appear more alive and interested since the days before trouble came to her. "Do you imagine we fought a battle over our shopping?" she asked, her lips curving with merriment.

"But you don't tell me. I'm anxious to know whether we shall see the boy dressed according to Red's ideas or yours."

"We agreed beautifully on nearly all points of his dressing. Where we differed, we—compromised."

"Red never compromises with anybody, so I suppose it was done by your giving in?"

"He never compromises? You do him injustice. He can compromise royally—by the same method of 'giving in.' "

"I simply can't believe it," murmured Martha, shaking her head.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH HE IS ROUGH ON A FRIEND

"RED!"

"Yes?"

"Are you through with that rabble? Can you 'tend to a friend?"

Redfield Pepper Burns wheeled around in his revolving chair and glanced sharply at Arthur Chester. What he saw made him follow the moment's inspection with a direct question.

"Sit down. What have you been doing?"

Chester sat down. His face was white. He held up one shaking hand. "Red, what's the matter with me?"

Burns continued to study the man before him. He made no move to examine into his condition, just looked steadily into the other's face with a gaze before which his patient presently shifted uneasily.

"Well, of all the ways to treat a fellow!" He tried to laugh. "Is that the way you do with the

rest of the bunch that come to you every day? Or are you trying to hypnotize me?"

"Look me in the eye, Ches. What have you been doing?"

"Working like a fiend in that infernal office. If there's any hotter place——"

"There'll be a hotter one for you right on this earth, if you keep on the way you're going."

He rose suddenly, and approaching Chester closely, looked intently into the uplifted eyes. He sat down again. "Own up!" he commanded bluntly.

"Red," begged Chester, "quit this sort of thing. Go at me in the usual way. I—I think I'm a bit nervous to-night. I can't stand your gun-fire."

"All right. When did you begin?"

"Five weeks ago when you were away. I didn't mean to get into it, Red, on my word I didn't, after all you've warned me. But it was so beastly hot—and there was a lot of extra work at the office. My head got to going it night and day. I—say"—he leaned suddenly forward, his head on his hands—"I can tell you better if you give me some kind of a bracer—I feel—so—deadly!"

Burns got up and prepared something in a glass —something not particularly palatable, but when it had taken action, which it promptly did, Chester's white face had acquired a tinge of colour and he could go on.

"I stopped in Gardner's office one day when my head was worse than usual. Had to meet a man in ten minutes—important deal on for the house —had to be at my best. Told Gardner so. He fixed me."

"He did—blame him—fixed you for a dope-fiend. I've told you a hundred times you had precisely the kind of temperament that must avoid that sort of thing like the gallows." Burns hit the desk with his fist as he spoke, with a thump of impatience.

"It seems to set me up for a while—I can do anything. Then afterward——"

"You're getting the afterward all right. How much do you take?"

Chester mentioned the amount of the drug, stating reluctantly that for the last two days he had been obliged slightly to increase it in order to get the full effect.

"Of course you have—that's the insidiousness

of the devil's stuff. How soon does it get into action?"

"Oh, right away—almost instantly."

"What! Is your imagination strong enough to—— See here, Ches"—Burns leaned forward—"you're taking the stuff by mouth, of course?"

Chester's eyes went down. "Why—I tried it that way—but it was so slow——"

Burns ejaculated something under his breath; the quick colour, always ready to flare under his clear skin, leaped out.

"Gardner gave you a hypo, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"So you went and bought a syringe and taught yourself the trick. Suppose you give me a look at it."

Like a shamed schoolboy Chester unwillingly drew forth the small case from his pocket. Burns received it. He opened it and took out the tiny instrument. "It looks like a very good one," he observed with a sort of deadly quietness, and with one motion of his big fingers snapped the glass barrel in two.

At this Chester took fire. "That's going a little too far!" he burst out in wrath.

"Is it? Thought it was you who had gone too far. It's up to me to bring you back—while I can. Getting this little fiend out of the way is the first step. Keep cool, Ches—and I'll try to do the same, though it makes my blood boil to think how little you've cared for my lectures to you on this very thing."

"I have cared. But I had no idea——"

"Well, you have one now. It's taken you five weeks to acquire enough of a habit to give you some trouble to drop it. You're that sort and that's the way it works, anyhow. I wonder you came to me to-night. Found yourself out of the stuff and didn't like to try to get it here where folks know you?"

"If you want to put everything in the most disagreeable way you can—yes," admitted Chester testily.

"That's precisely what I want to do. Put it in such a disagreeable way that your backbone'll stiffen up a bit and give us something to start with. If I make you mad all the better—so long as you don't go back to fools like Gardner, who never hesitate to give a fellow like you a sample of what that drug'll do for 'em."

"What are you going to do? I shan't sleep to-night, and I've got to be in the office to-morrow morning."

"When's your vacation due?"

"Not till week after next."

"Arrange to take it now."

"I can't. Stillinger's off on his, Monday morning."

"Could you have yours now if he waited?"

"Yes, but I wouldn't ask him."

"I would." Burns took down the receiver of his desk telephone.

"Red, stop—I don't want——"

Burns paid no attention to him. In five minutes he had the city connection and his man. He stated the case: Chester was in urgent need of taking his vacation without delay, but was not willing to ask the favour of his office associate. He, Burns, his friend's physician, did not scruple to ask it if it would not interfere too seriously with Mr. Stillinger's plans. No diplomat could request a favour more courteously than R. P. Burns, M.D. The reply was the one to be expected of Stillinger, bachelor and amiable fellow, who was fond of Chester and hoped it was noth-

ing serious. Tell him to go ahead with his vacation, Stillinger said, and not to worry over office affairs.

"Now!" Burns wheeled round from the telephone. "Will you put yourself in my hands?"

"Do you honestly think I'm such an abandoned case—already," began Chester unhappily, "that you have to——"

"Listen to me, Ches. I don't think you're an abandoned case—that's nonsense—after five weeks. But I do think you're well started on a road that it's ruin to travel. You began it way back last winter by taking that headache stuff in double the dose I gave you, without consulting me, every time you felt a trifle below par. That's why I took it away from you. You felt the loss of it, and you were an easy mark for Gardner's dope. You've grown so dependent on that already that you're going to have a fight to get along without it. You can't fight and do office work, so I'm going to make the most of my chance during this fortnight's vacation—if you'll give me leave. If you won't—I think I'll knock you down and get you where I want you, that way."

He smiled—a smile with so much spirit and

affection in it that Chester's eyes filled, to his own astonishment, for up to this point he had been both hurt and angry. After a moment he said, with his eyes on the floor, but in a different tone from any he had yet used: "Go ahead, Red. I'll try to prove I have some stuff in me yet."

"Of course you have." Burns's hand was on his friend's shoulder. "That's what I'm counting on. Prove it by following directions to the letter. And begin by coming with me for a trip into the country. I have to see a case before I go to bed, and the air will do your head good."

It was the first of many similar trips. Arthur Chester may fairly have been said to spend the succeeding fortnight in the company of the Green Imp and its driver. From morning till night, and often in the night itself when he found it impossible to sleep, he was living in the open air by means of this device. Of walking, also, he did an increasing amount as his strength grew under the regimen Burns insisted upon. But for the first week, in spite of all the help his physician could give him, he found himself indeed involved in a fierce struggle—a struggle with shaken and unmanageable nerves; with a desperate craving for

the soothing, uplifting effect of the drug to which he was forced to admit he had become perilously accustomed; with a black depression of spirit which was worse than anything else he had to combat.

It was at the worst of one of these periods of darkness that, alone with his patient upon a hill-top where the two had climbed, leaving the Green Imp at a point where the road had become impossible, Burns said suddenly:

"Ches, I believe, with all my care to give you the treatment I thought you needed, I've failed to point out the most potent remedy of all."

Chester shook his head. "You've done everything, Red. All the trouble's with me. I'm so pitiably weak—so much weaker than I ever dreamed I could be. I can't seem to care whether I get out of this or not. All I want is to lie down and go to sleep—and never wake up."

The last words came under his breath, but Burns heard them. He showed no sign of being startled, though this mood was a gloomier one than he had yet seen his patient succumb to. Instead, he went on talking in a tone of confidence:

"I ought to have known enough to apply this

remedy, because it's one I've tried myself. If you could know, since the night you heard me make a certain vow, what a time I've had with myself to keep it, you'd understand that I know what it means to try to break up a habit. Mine's the habit of years. With my temper and some of my associations, intemperate profanity's been the easiest thing in the world to fall into. When things went wrong, out would come the oaths like water out of a spring—though that's a false comparison: like the filth out of a sewer, I'd better say."

"We all swear more or less," acknowledged Chester, his head in his hands.

"Not as I did—and you know it. I've been responsible for many a boy's taking it up, though I didn't realize it. Because I was athletic and in for sports with them, they thought I was the whole thing. They laughed when I got mad and ripped out a lot of language: they copied it. But I never heard myself as others hear me till that night I let go at the mother who'd ignorantly murdered her boy by disobeying orders. On the way home that night I woke up—came to myself—I don't know how. The stars were unusually

bright, and I looked up at them and thought of that child's soul going back to its Maker . . . and then thought of my curses following it and coming to His ear."

A silence fell. When Burns broke it, it was in a voice deep with feeling.

"The next words I sent up to that ear were in a different shape. I think it was the first real prayer I'd ever said since the little parrot prayers my mother taught me. That was the first: it hasn't been the last. I don't suppose I say much that would sound like the preacher's language, but Ches, what I do believe is that—I get what I ask for. That's—help to fight my temptations. And profanity isn't the only one nor the toughest one to down."

Chester looked up. For a moment he forgot himself and his wretchedness. "It's hard to believe it's you, Red—talking like this."

"I know it must be hard, but it ought to be the more convincing on that account. I belong to a profession of materialists, and all at once it's grown to seem to me the strangest thing in life that a man who studies the anatomy of this body of ours should be a materialist. To watch its

workings and then doubt the God who made it is sheer wilful blindness. But, Ches—I've got my eyes open at last. The God who made me is up there, and He knows and cares how I go on with the job. As for answering my appeals for help when I get hard pressed—the biggest sign I have of that is a human one. Since Bobby Burns came to sleep in that little bed next mine, it's been a whole lot easier to get on."

A deep sigh was Chester's reply to this. He had a small boy and girl of his own. For their sakes and Winifred's he knew he must fight this fight out and win. But as for getting tangible help from the Creator of a body handicapped by nerves like his! He began to say this, but Burns broke in upon him with the answer he would least have expected at a moment like this —a great, ringing laugh, the sound of which brought the slow blood to Chester's white face.

"If you consider wrecked nerves like mine a laughing matter—" he broke out.

But Burns, his laugh over, was sober again and his voice was earnest. "Arthur Chester, don't make Him responsible for your 'wrecked nerves.' They weren't wrecked when you were furnished

with them. You've done the wrecking yourself by breaking pretty nearly every law that governs the workings of the human machine. You're paying the penalty. But you're going to get the upper hand. From now on, in spite of your office life, you're going to get good red blood in your veins—and your brains. The worst is over now—the second week will be easier. But what I'm trying to tell you is that you'll get that upper hand a lot quicker if"—his cheek grew hot with this strange, unaccustomed effort at putting things he had never spoken of before into words—"if you'll just reach up and take hold of that 'Upper Hand' that, according to my new belief and experience, is ready to reach down to you. It's stronger than yours: you'll feel the upward pull."

He broke off and got to his feet. The two had been sitting on a fallen log, looking off over the hills toward a distant river winding its blue length through fields of living green.

"I wasn't exactly cut out for a preacher, Ches," he added after a minute. "I hope my talk doesn't sound to you like 'cant.' I'm a pretty poor specimen of a chap to be setting up my own example for anybody to follow."

"I don't think you've been setting up your own example," Chester replied. He pulled himself up limply from the log, yet out of his face had gone the black look which had been there when he came up the hill. "And what you've said doesn't sound like *'cant'* to me, Red. It sounds more like *'can.'* "

Red Pepper Burns held out his hand. His big, warm fingers closed hard over the thin, cold ones which met them. Then the two men, without more words, went away down the hill. From this hour Arthur Chester afterward dated the beginning of the end of the fight.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH HE PRESCRIBES FOR HIMSELF

"RED," observed James Macauley, Junior, "this place of yours looks like a drunkard's home."

He glanced around him as he spoke. The criticism certainly found justification in every corner. No more neglected office could have been discovered belonging to any practitioner within an area of many miles.

"I suppose it does," rejoined Burns from the depths of a big, dusty leather chair where he sat stretched in an attitude expressing extreme fatigue. "But I don't care a hang."

Macauley looked at him. His eyes were closed. His arms lay upon the chair arms, relaxed and limp. For the first time his friend observed what might have been noted by a critical eye on any day during the last fortnight. The lines on the ordinarily strong, health-tinted face were deeper than he had ever seen them; the cheeks

were thinner; there were even shadows under the thick eyelashes which outlined the lids of the closed eyes.

"Look here, old man," Macauley cried, sudden conviction seizing him, "you're working altogether too hard. This miserable city epidemic has done you out. I've thought all the time you were trying to cover too much ground."

"Ground's had to be covered," replied the other briefly, without opening his eyes.

"Have the other fellows worked as hard as you?"

"Harder."

"I don't believe it. They're all city men. You've done all this city work and looked after your own patients here, too, to say nothing of living in both places at once. With your housekeeper gone home to her sick folks, and Miss Mathewson off on one of your cases—no wonder this place looks the way it does."

"It doesn't matter. Cut it out about the place. I'm going back in ten minutes."

"You are! Not going to get to bed?"

"Don't know. I might snatch a nap now if you'd quit talking."

Macauley closed his mouth. Presently he got up and stole out of the room. He was back again in a trice, a flask in one hand, a soda siphon in the other, and a small glass balanced on his thumb. When Burns, at the sound of a clock striking somewhere, rubbed his eyes with his fists and reluctantly opened them, Macauley spoke briskly:

"See here—I'm going to give you a bracer. I know your confounded notions, but they don't cut any figure when you need something to pull you together the way you do to-night."

He started to measure out the amber liquid into the glass, but Burns put up a hand.

"Much obliged, but I don't want any."

"You idiot—don't you know when to make an exception to your rule? I admit you've won out over the other fellows just by keeping a steady hand, but you're dead as a dog for rest to-night and you need a stiff one, if I'm any judge."

"You're not—for me." Burns sat up. "Heavens, man, if I were going to break my rule at all it wouldn't be for a drink of anything. It would be for a stab in the arm with something that beats your stuff all out for stimulating the

fatigue out of a fellow and making him feel like working till he drops."

"Why don't you have it then?" asked Macauley curiously. "I should think if ever a used-up chap were justified in——"

"Don't give me that talk if you're my friend. It's hard enough to hold out without resorting to that game. I don't need you to advise it. I've seen enough of that sort of suicide. Buller and Fields are both down and out, and they began to brace early in the epidemic. Van Horn's a wreck, though he keeps going; and I tell you, I've more respect for that man than I ever had before. He's a *poseur* and a toadier, no doubt of that, and I've always despised him for it, but he has real ability and he's worked like a fiend through this muss, and not all for his rich patients, either. But he's weakening fast, and it's drug stimulation that's done it. No, sir: not for mine. But I'll make myself a cup of coffee, for I've got to keep awake, and I shall sleep in my tracks if I don't."

He got up and stumbled out into his deserted kitchen. Macauley followed, helping as best he knew how, and watched his friend gulp down two cupfuls of a muddy liquid with a feeling of ad-

miration such as a small act of large significance may sometimes stir in one who apprehends.

Two days later Burns, starting toward home in the Imp at a late hour in the morning, passed a figure on a corner of a city street waiting for the outward-bound trolley. He slowed down beside it.

"May I take you home?" he asked, cap in hand, and interest showing in eyes which a moment before had been heavy with fatigue.

Ellen Lessing looked up. "I shall be very glad," she answered, as she met his outstretched hand and let it draw her upward to the vacant seat. "The car is always so full at this hour, and I was longing for the feeling of the wind against my face."

"It's cool for late August, and you'll get a breeze on the road home that will refresh you. You haven't touched water or milk in this plague-stricken district, I hope?"

"No, indeed. Martha warned me a dozen times before I left. How are things? Any better?"

"No new cases in twenty-four hours, and the old ones well in hand. I'm getting home earlier to-day than I've done for a month, and hope to

have a few hours off duty. I was planning what to do with them as I came upon you."

"I should think you could do nothing better with them than to go home and sleep," she advised, looking up at his face with a critical, friendly survey of the signs of weariness written plainly there. "You are worn out, and that means something when one says it of so strong a man as you."

"I could sleep a week, but I'm not sure that a few hours would more than aggravate my need. Besides, I shouldn't be at home an hour before I should be called out again. No, my plans were forming themselves differently, and now that I've met you they're taking definite shape. I want—well—suppose I don't tell you! Would you trust me to take you off on a rest-seeking expedition without explaining what I mean to do?"

"On a 'rest-seeking expedition'?" she repeated. "Doctor Burns, are you sure you hadn't better go on that alone? Suppose I chatter all the way?"

He smiled. "You're not a chatterer. And I don't want to go alone. I haven't had a chance for an hour with you for a month, I think. This is the only way I can get it. Will you go?"

"You provoke my curiosity. Yes, I think I'll go. I've been shopping all the morning and I deserve a reward of rest, if you're sure you know where to find it."

He turned the Imp abruptly aside from the boulevard leading out of town down which they had been speeding. He made a détour of certain side streets which brought him up before a small establishment bearing a sign which set forth an alluring invitation to motoring parties in need of food. He disappeared therein, and was absent for the space of a full twenty minutes. When he returned he was followed by a waiter with a hamper to whose bestowal in the back of the car he looked carefully.

As they sped away again, Burns turned to his companion, a smile of anticipation on his face, to meet a glance of some apprehension.

"You're not repenting your rash trust of me already, are you?" he demanded.

"I'm remembering that Martha has four guests at luncheon to-day, and expects me to be there!"

"Is that all? Don't let that worry you. We'll simply have a breakdown somewhere on the road —conveniently near to a spot I know, where I

can broil the beefsteak I have in that hamper, and make the coffee. *'Unavoidable detention'* will be your apology."

"*'Irresistible temptation'* will be my confession," she admitted. "I'm not good at subterfuge and I'm so hungry that the mere mention of beefsteak out-of-doors——"

"If it weighs against the pâtës and salads of a woman's luncheon I shall have a great respect for you. Come on, let's run away! You from social duties, I from professional ones. I'll agree to stand out Martha in your defense. Unless, of course, the opportunity to wear a pretty frock and throw all the other women in the shade——"

She laughed. "That's precisely what Martha wants me to do!"

"Then fail her and let the other women win. It's too late to repent, anyhow, for here's where we turn off."

The Imp itself seemed to be running away, so swiftly and silently it covered the new road leading off into the hills. Presently it was climbing them.

"I want to get where no call-boy monotonously repeating *'Doc-tor Bur-rns, Doc-tor Bur-rns'*, can get hold of me," the Imp's driver explained.

"I suppose you're not dressed—nor shod—for a rough walk of a quarter of a mile where the car can't go?"

"I'll sacrifice skirts and soles," she promised. "Isn't the air out here glorious? I thought I was tired when I left the city: now I could climb that hill and enjoy it."

"That's precisely what we'll do, then. There's a view from the top worth the scramble, but I wasn't sure you'd be game for it. Perhaps I'll know you better at the end of this afternoon than I do now. Is there a jolly, athletic girl hidden away under that demure manner of yours I've seen so far, I wonder?"

"Lead the way up that hill and you'll find out," she answered with a challenging flash of her dark eyes.

He lodged the Imp among a clump of pines, got out the hamper and turned to his companion. She had pulled off her gloves, removed hat and veil and folded her long, gray coat away in the car. This left her dressed in the trim gray skirt of walking length and the gray silk blouse she had worn for shopping. Burns looked at her with approval.

"Transformed by magic from a fashionable lady in street attire to a girl ready for the woods," was his comment. "I'm glad you leave off the hat—I'll match you by doffing the cap. Now, aren't we a pair? Are you in for a rush up that first slope? Jove, I'm not half so tired as I was an hour ago, already!"

He caught her hand in his, his other ran through the hamper handle, and ran with her up the slope. At the edge of the steeper climb to come they stopped, breathing fast. "This isn't the way to begin, of course," he admitted as they both regained their breath, laughing at their own enthusiasm, "but I couldn't resist that dash—a sort of dash for freedom. Now we'll take it more easily."

They worked their way up and up among the rocks, he always in advance, reaching down a muscular right arm to help her at the steeper places, and once giving her a knee to step on when progress could be made only up the straight face of a big boulder. It was undoubtedly a stiff climb for a woman, but she showed no signs of flinching, and though her cheeks glowed richly and her wavy black locks were a trifle loosened from their

usual order when at last she set foot upon the plateau at the top, she showed only the temporary fatigue to be expected after such unusual exertion.

"That makes the blood course through one's arteries in a way worth while," was his comment as he regarded with satisfaction the splendid colour in her cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes. "Talk about rest! That's the way to get it! Burn up the products of fatigue, replace them with fresh cells full of oxygen, and you get rejuvenation. Look at that stretch of country before us! Isn't that worth the climb?"

"It's glorious! I've often looked at this height as our car drove by on the road over there, and wanted to climb it. But Martha and Jim are always for reeling off miles, and so, I thought, were you. I imagined there was nobody but myself to care for this."

"And I thought you liked the porch and the pretty clothes you wear there better than anything I could show you in the open," he owned with a laugh. "Not that I haven't enjoyed that porch and the sight of the clothes—they don't seem to be just like Martha's and Winifred's, somehow, though I can't tell why! I've wanted to

ask you off for a trip like this, but never was sure you'd enjoy it. I'm glad I've found out. I feel as if I'd wasted the summer!"

He fell to gathering wood for his fire, and when she had regained her breath she helped him in spite of his remonstrance. "Let me have all the fun, too," she begged. "I haven't had a chance like this for four years. I used to camp in flannels all summer long, in the roughest sort of style, and loved it dearly. I could stand the tension of a long social winter twice as well as the other women on account of it."

He understood, knowing that her husband had occupied a prominent official position which called upon him to maintain a corresponding place in the society of the city in which they had lived. Although he knew her to be still under thirty, he realized that on account of her early marriage she had had much experience in the world of affairs. It was this aspect of her he had always borne in mind as he had seen her before. Now he was beginning to recognize another side of her character and tastes, a side which interested him even more than the other had done.

Like a pair of children they collected their fire-

wood, racing together to the base of operations with armfuls of dry sticks. When there was a big pile she surprised him by asking to be allowed to make the fire herself.

"I'll prove to you I'm a woodsman," she asserted, and when she had performed her task after the most approved fashion of the skilled camper, he acknowledged that she had made good her boast. As the smoke cleared away in the direction which left the view unobscured and the spot he had selected for the lunching-place free from smoke, he grinned approvingly.

"I've no doubt you could grill the steak and brew the coffee with equal skill," he admitted, "but I'm not going to let you. That's my job. I want to prove my prowess. Sit down on that log, please, and oversee me."

She watched with hungry interest while he also gave evidence of his craft. It could hardly be the first time that a hamper had been packed for him at the place in the city, for nothing he needed had been left out, even to a big bottle of spring water with which to make the coffee. When his work was nearly complete she spread a square of white linen upon a flat rock and set forth the

other contents of the hamper—olives and bread and butter, crisp celery-hearts, and cream cheese and a tin of biscuits. She heated the plates and cups before the fire, and as he withdrew his steak from the coals she set a smoking hot platter before him and offered him the materials for seasoning.

"You're a crack camper for sure," he declared. "Ah-h—does that steak look fit for the gods, or not? How's the coffee? Clear?"

"Perfect. And the steak looks as if it would melt in one's mouth. Oh, isn't this fun? How glad I am I'm here and not at that luncheon!" She consulted a tiny watch. "It's two o'clock—they're sitting down," she exulted. "Martha has waited half an hour for me and given me up, and she's perfectly furious. I'm wicked enough to feel that that fact is going to make this meal taste all the better!"

"Stolen steak and bread and butter eaten in secret have an extra relish—no doubt of that. Here—this juicy bit is for you to begin on. Set your teeth into it, partner! How's that for food, I ask of you?"

Sitting on the ground opposite each other with the flat rock between, they consumed this Arca-

dian banquet, eating with the zest born of exertion and the open air, the sunshine and the comradeship.

"Nothing has tasted quite so good to me in a year," said she when the steak had vanished, dipping a white celery-heart in salt and biting the end off with teeth still whiter.

"Nothing ever tasted so good to me," said he, leaning on his elbow and spreading a crisp biscuit with a layer of cheese. "I always think that of each meal I eat in a place like this, but this one seems to have a special flavour. I wonder if it can be the company?"

He smiled across at her, the sunshine among the pine needles of the tree above him throwing flecks of bright copper among the thick locks of his hair.

"I think the company is usually an important part of all such outings," she admitted frankly. "I never took one before in the society of a worn-out doctor who began to look like a boy again before he had finished his coffee. I really shouldn't know you were the same person who invited me to go on this expedition."

"There's nothing like it for renewing one, body and mind. Actual physical repose isn't

often the best cure for weariness: it's change of thought and occupation, particularly if the open air is a part of the cure. I've forgotten I have a care in the world: all I can think of is—may I say it?—yourself! I can't get over the wonder of seeing you turn from what Bob calls his 'pretty lady' into the girl I see before me—a girl who looks about nineteen, with a capacity for good sport in the open air I never dreamed of."

"The open air would renew everybody's youth, I think, if everybody would go to living out-of-doors. We're through, aren't we? There isn't a crumb left! Now please go off and let me clear up and pack away. That's always the woman's part. Couldn't you lie down on that inviting carpet of needles over there under the big pine and get a bit of sleep?"

"Sleep—when I can talk to you?"

She nodded. "Yes, indeed. I'm not going to talk just now, anyhow, so you might as well make the best of it. Throw yourself down with your hands under your head, and look up at those beautiful boughs. Please!"

Rather reluctantly he obeyed, and she could see that, weary as he undoubtedly still was in

spite of the refreshing meal, he really did not want to lose any of her society. Lying at full length on his side, his head propped on his hand, talking in the lazy tone of after-dinner content which had descended upon him, he continued to watch her as she repacked the hamper. It was not until she deliberately forsook him that he gave up to her wishes. But when, having been out of his sight for ten minutes, she peered cautiously through the bushes behind which she had screened herself, she saw what she had hoped for. His whole weary frame was stretched upon the pine-needle carpet, the lines of his face were relaxed, and his eyes fast shut.

The sun was far down the hills when he awoke. He lay blinking at the low-sweeping boughs above him for a little without realizing where he was; then, as the midsummer stillness which surrounded him took hold of his senses, he turned his head to recall to himself the conditions under which he had been sleeping. Only the hamper under a tree close by gave evidence that he was here by his own volition. He stared about, remembering that he had had a companion. He got somewhat stiffy to his feet, discovering as

he did so that he had lain for a long time without stirring from the position in which slumber had overtaken him.

"Mrs. Lessing!" he called.

From some distance away came back a blithe answer: "Here, Doctor Burns!"

He started in the direction of the voice and presently came upon her sitting on a big granite boulder, busy with a lapful of pine cones out of which she seemed to be constructing something. She looked up, smiling.

"Why in the world did you let me sleep all the afternoon?" he reproached her.

"I should have wakened you in ten minutes more. Have I made you late for your work? I understood that you could afford a few hours for rest. You've only slept three."

"Three! Good heavens! When I might have been spending them with you!"

He looked so chagrined that her smile changed into outright laughter. "You are very flattering. But I've been taking much more satisfaction in your repose than I could possibly have done in your society, no matter how brilliant you might have been."

"That's not flattering, but I admit it has its practical side. Those three hours' sleep in the open air have put me on my feet again. Just the same, I want to eat my cake and have it, too! Promise me three consecutive hours of your company when I'm awake, or I shan't get over regretting what I've missed. Will you do this again with me some September day when I can make the time?"

"I promise with pleasure. I've had a charming afternoon all by myself and wandered all over the hillside, dreaming midsummer day-dreams. We must go, mustn't we?" She stood up, her hands full of her work.

"Tell me some of them, won't you, while we climb down to the car?" he begged.

"My happiest one," she said as they descended, "is the making of a country home for little crippled children. I think I've found the spot—the old Fairmount place—it's not more than five miles from here. If I can only buy it at a reasonable figure——"

"Mrs. Lessing!" he broke in. "So that's the sort of thing that makes your day-dreams! No wonder—well!——"

"Why should you be surprised? Isn't that a delightful dream? If I can only make it come true——"

"You can. Do you want a visiting surgeon?"

"Of course I do. Will you——"

"Why, Mrs. Lessing," said he, stopping short just below her on the steep path and looking up into her face with eyes of eager pleasure, "that's been one of my dreams so long I can't remember when I began to think about it. But I haven't been able to finance it yet, nor to find time to get anybody else to do it. If you'll provide the place I'll do everything I can to make it a success. There are no less than four children this minute I'm longing to get into such a home. We'll go into partnership if you'll take me. I—why—you see, I can't even talk straight about it! And you—I thought you were a society woman!"

"I am a society woman, I suppose," she answered laughing, "though our ideas might differ as to what that term stands for. But why should that prevent my caring for this lovely plan?"

"Evidently it doesn't. How many sides have you, anyhow? I've found out two new ones today. Girl—and patron saint——"

"Ah, don't make fun of me. I'm no girl and very far from any kind of saint. Please help me down this four-foot drop as if I were a very, very old lady, for my head is dizzy with joy that I've found somebody to care for my schemes."

He leaped down and held up his arms. "Come, grandma!" he invited, his face full of mischief and enthusiasm and happiness.

"I think I'll play girl, after all," she refused gaily and, accepting one hand only, swung herself lightly down to his side.

"And it's 'bracers' the fellows think they need to put the heart back into them!" jeered Red Pepper Burns to himself. "Let them try the open country and a comrade like this—if there is another anywhere on earth! But they can't have *her!*"

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH HE CONTINUES TO SAW WOOD

HERE you are at last, Red, you sinner, and I'm the loser. Ches and I've had a bet on since we saw the Green Imp tear off just as the first guests were coming. I vowed it was a fake call and you'd never get back till the musicians were green-flannelling their instruments."

"I knew he wouldn't do us a cut-away trick like that," declared Arthur Chester with an affectionate, white-gloved hand on Burns's black-clad arm. "Not that I'd have blamed you on a night like this. What people want to give dances for in August, with the thermometer at the top of the tree, I don't know."

"Go along in, old man, and see the ladies. Take out Pauline. Mrs. Lessing isn't dancing. Make a sitting-out engagement with the lovely widow, then bolt out here. That's my advice," urged Macauley.

"Much obliged, I will. Wouldn't have come if Winifred hadn't cornered me."

"She's doing her duty by Pauline, and she considers her duty isn't done till she's secured the men Pauline wants. But I say—when you get a look at Ellen you'll forget the rivulets coursing down your neck. It's the first time she's worn anything not suggestive of past experiences. It's only white to-night, but——" Macauley's pause was eloquent.

Burns pushed on into the house, through whose open doors and windows came sounds of revelry. A stringed orchestra was playing somewhere out of sight, and to its music the late arrival, holding his head well up that he might keep his collar intact until the latest possible moment, set his course toward his hostess.

Outside, in the bower which had been made of the porch, Chester, disgracefully shuffling off the duties of host and lounging with Macauley and two or three other of the young married men, reported through the flower-hung window the progress of the victim led to the sacrifice.

"He's shouldered his way to Win—he's shaking hands and trying not to look hot. Hi! Pauline's sighted him already. She's making for him like the arrow to the target——"

"Or the bullet for the hippopotamus," suggested Macauley under his breath in Chester's ear. He, too, began to reconnoitre.

"He's asking her if she saved the first one for him, and she's telling him she did till the last minute. Her card is full now, but he shall have the last half of this next one. Doesn't he look overjoyed?" Chester chuckled wickedly.

"Where's Ellen? Why isn't she on deck now just as Red comes?" Macauley began to fume. "She's behaved nobly all the evening so far—she might have a rational being now for a partner as her reward. But I presume she's sitting out somewhere with that chump of a Wardlaw—he follows her like a shadow and she's too kind-hearted to shake him. She's——"

A voice speaking softly from the lawn below the porch interrupted him. "Is Doctor Burns here?" it asked.

Chester went over to the rail. "He's only just come, you know, Miss Mathewson. You don't have to call him out this minute, do you?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Chester, but I'm afraid I must. The call is very urgent."

"Tell 'em to get somebody else."

"Doctor Burns wouldn't like it—they're special friends of his."

"Oh, well—I suppose he'll see the bright side of getting out of that Turkish bath in there, but I must say I wish I didn't have to pull through this whole affair without his support," grumbled Chester as he went in to find Burns, now disappeared into the inner rooms where the music came from.

Red Pepper came out looking the name more than usual, for three rounds of the floor had brought, as it seemed to him, every drop of blood to his face, and his hair clung damply to his brow. He held a brief colloquy with his office nurse.

"No way out; I'll have to go, Ches," said he with ill-concealed joy.

"But you'll hustle? You'll make one more try of it?" begged Chester. "This thing won't break up early: not with Pauline pushing it. You'll be back in time to be taken out and fed?"

"Try to," and Burns disappeared off the end of the porch.

"Lucky dog," gloomed Macauley. "The call's

five miles out on the road to the city. I'd like to be in the Green Imp for the spin Red'll make of it. By George! I——"

He broke off suddenly, gave a hasty look around, and bolted off the end of the porch into the semi-darkness of the lawn. He ran across behind the houses to his own back porch, procured a dustcoat from within and dashed back, regardless of the bodily heat he was generating. As the Green Imp backed out of the barn Macauley swung himself into the unoccupied seat.

Burns, also in dust-coat pulled on over his evening clothes, grinned cheerfully. "Deserter?" he queried.

"You'll be back within the hour, won't you?"

"Less than that, probably. The Imp's running like a bird to-night—show you her paces when we get out. Hi, there! Who's that chasing us? Well, of all the—you, too, Ches?"

Panting, Chester flung himself upon the running-board just as the car turned out of the yard. "Had a hunt for my coat—nearly lost you!" he gasped.

Burns stopped the car. "See here, sonny," he expostulated. "You happen to be host, you

know. I might be detained out there, though I don't expect it."

"I'll take the trolley back if you are," replied Chester, settling himself. "I can't stand it to see you fellows cut away out of the pow-wow and not go, too. I'll take my chances."

"So be it!" and, laughing, with a glance back at the gaily lighted house, Burns sent the car on her course. "You two are always bragging up the married life," he remarked as the Green Imp gathered speed, "but it strikes me you're pretty eager to get away from the glories of your wives' entertaining."

"It's one curious thing," admitted Macauley thoughtfully, "that no matter how harmonious a couple may be they're bound to differ on what does and does not constitute entertainment."

"Of course, a girl like Pauline always wants to dance, no matter how torrid the night," explained Chester. "Win and I have to consider our guest's wish. But you can bet Paul isn't getting her wish—not with R. P. Burns running around the country all the evening and only making five-minute stops at her side."

By the speed with which the Green Imp swal-

lowed the ground it looked as if Burns might make several such trips and still interpolate a number of "five-minute stops" before the affair at the Chester house should be over. Before his passengers were well aware of the distance they had covered he pulled up in front of a small cottage. They settled themselves comfortably to await a fifteen-minute stay, but in five he was out again. Both dust-coat and clawhammer were off—his sleeves were rolled to the elbow.

"I'm in for it, boys," he said. "Can't get away under two hours at the shortest. Sorry. But they didn't let me know what they wanted me for, and I'm caught. You'll have to drive home. Call up Johnny Caruthers and let him bring back the Imp and Miss Mathewson. I can't be spared long enough to go myself, so take her this note to tell her what to bring. Get busy, now."

He handed Macauley a hasty scrawl on a prescription blank, and smiled at the discomfited faces of his two friends showing plainly in the lights which streamed from the house.

"You look blamed pleased over your job," growled Macauley.

"I like the job all right," admitted Burns; "particularly when contrasted with——"

"You wouldn't say it if you'd caught one glimpse of Mrs. L——" called back Chester, as the Imp responded somewhat erratically to Macauley's unaccustomed touch. But all the answer they got was an emphatic "Don't change gears as if you were running a thrashing machine, Mac."

It was two hours and a half later that Burns came out of the small cottage again, wiping a damp face, his white shirt-front a pathetic ruin, his hastily-reassumed white waistcoat and tie decidedly the worse for having been carelessly handled. But his face, when he turned it towards the stars as he crossed the tiny patch of a flower-bordered yard, was a contented one.

"It pays up all the arrears when you can leave a chunk of happiness behind you as big as that one," he said to himself. Johnny Caruthers had gone home by trolley long ago, and Miss Mathewson was to remain for the night and return with the doctor when he came for his morning after-visit. Burns sent the Green Imp off at a moderate pace, musing as he drove through the now moderated and refreshing air of two o'clock in the morning,.

"Party must be about over by now; think it'll adjourn without seeing any more of Red Pepper and his misused dress clothes," he reflected. "I suppose those dancing puppets think they've had a good time, but it isn't in it with mine. Bless the little woman: she's happy over her first boy! He's a winner, too. As for Tom, I could have tipped him over with a nod of the head when he was thanking me for leaving the merry-go-round to stand by. It must feel pretty good to be the father of a promising specimen like that. Must beat the adopting business several leagues. And that's not saying that Bobby Burns isn't the best thing that ever happened to R. P."

Philosophizing thus, he presently sent the Green Imp at her quietest pace in at the home driveway. The Chester house was still brilliantly illumined; his own dark except for the dim light in the office and—he discovered it as he rounded the turn—a sort of half-radiance coming from the windows of his own room, where Bob slept in the small bed beside his own. Burns gazed anxiously at this, for it showed that somebody had turned on the hooded electric. He was accustomed to leave the door open into his private office, in

which a light was always burning, and with this Bob had hitherto been satisfied.

"He must have waked up and called for Cynthia," he decided. Housing the Imp, he quietly crossed the lawn to the window, avoiding any sound of footsteps on the gravelled paths. Both windows, screened by wire and awnings, were wide open; he could see with ease into the room, for the house was an old one and stood low. Climbing wistaria vines wreathed the windows, and sheltered by these he found himself secure from observation.

For after the first look he became exceedingly anxious not to be discovered. He had come home in the stirred and gentle mood often brought upon him by his part in such a scene as the one he had lately left behind him. In the first wave of joy swept by a birth into a home, whether humble or exalted, the man who has been of service in the hour of trial is often caught and lifted into a sympathetic pleasure which lasts for some time after he has gone on to less satisfying work. Burns had often jeered gently at himself for being, as he considered, more than ordinarily susceptible to a sort of odd tenderness of feeling under

such conditions, and as he stared in at the scene before him he was uneasily conscious that he could not have come upon it at a more vulnerable moment.

Bobby Burns was sitting straight up in bed, his cheeks flushed, his eyelids reddened as if with prolonged crying, but his small face radiant with happiness as he regarded his companion, his plump little fist thrust tight into the hand which held his. In a chair close beside him sat a figure in silvery white; bare, beautifully-moulded arms, from which the gloves had been pulled and flung aside upon the bed, gleaming in the glow from the hooded light.

Black head was close to black head, her black lashes and his disclosed dark eyes curiously alike in the distracting glance of them; even the colouring of the faces was similar, for both showed the warm and peachy hues laid there by the summer sun.

"They might easily be mother and son," was the thought forced upon the spectator. His own cheek suddenly burned, in the shadow of the wistaria vines.

He listened abstractedly to the conclusion of the story: it must have been a charming tale,

for the boy's cry of regret when it ended was eloquent. But the eavesdropper heard with full appreciation the richness of the low voice and could not wonder at Bob's delight in it. He watched with absorbed eyes the embrace exchanged between the two and, forgetting to be cautious, allowed his shifted foot to crunch the gravel under the window.

Quicker than thought the light went out. Burns made for the office door, consumed with eagerness to catch her before she could get away. But when he set foot upon the threshold of his room only the little figure, pulling itself again erect in the bed, met his eyes in the dim light issuing from the office, and otherwise the room was empty.

"Nobody heard me cryin' but her," explained Bob to his questioning guardian. "Cynthia was all goned away and I heard the fiddles and they made me cry. She comed in and told me stories. I love her. But she wented awful quick out that way." He pointed toward a French window opening like a door upon the lawn. "I wish she didn't go so quick. She looked awful pretty, all white and shiny. She loves me, I think, don't you?"

"Of course, old man. That's your particular good luck—eh? Now lie down and go to sleep and tell me all about it in the morning."

"Aren't you going back to the party?" queried Bob anxiously.

"Hardly." Burns glanced humorously down at his attire. "But I'm not going to bed just yet, so shut your eyes. I'll not be far away."

The child obeyed. Exchanging the claw-hammer for his office coat, Burns went out by way of the French window to the rear of the house.

An hour afterward Arthur Chester, putting out lights, discovered from a back window a familiar figure at a familiar occupation. But at this hour of the night the sight struck him as so extraordinary that, curiosity afire, he hurriedly let himself out of the side door he had just locked, and crossed the lawn.

"In the name of all lunatics, Red, why sawing wood? It can't be ill temper at missing the show?"

In the August moonlight the figure straightened itself and laid down the saw. "Go to bed, and don't bother your addle pate about your neigh-

bours. Can't a man cut up a few sticks without your coming to investigate?"

"Saw a few more. You haven't got the full dose necessary yet," advised Chester, his hands in his pockets. "Want me to sit up with you till you work it all off?"

"It's beginning to look as if it wouldn't work off," muttered R. P. Burns.

"Must be a worse attack than usual. How long have you been at it?"

"Don't know."

"Sawed that whole heap at the side there?"

"Suppose so."

"Lost a patient?"

"No."

"Blow out a tire?"

"No."

"Bad news of any sort?"

"*No.* Go to bed."

"I feel I oughtn't to leave you," persisted Chester. "Don't you think it might ease your mind to tell me about it?"

Burns came to him with the saw, and Chester fled. Burns went back to his woodpile, marshalled the sawed sticks into orderly ranks,

then stood still once more and once more looked up at the stars.

"If an hour of that on a night like this won't take the nonsense out of me," he solemnly explained to a bright particular planet now low in the heavens, "I must be past help. But I'll be—drawn and quartered—if I'll give in. Haven't I had knockouts enough to be able to keep my head this time? Red Pepper Burns, *'Remember the Maine!'* Now, go to bed yourself!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH HE IS UNREASONABLY PREOCCUPIED

RED PEPPER BURNS, put down that stuff and come over. It's nine oclock, and Pauline goes to-morrow, as you very well know. And not only Paul, but Mrs. Lessing. Paul's persuaded her to start when she does, though she wasn't expecting to go for three days longer."

R. P. Burns looked up abstractedly. "Can't come now. I'm busy," he replied, and immediately became reabsorbed in the big book he was studying.

Chester gazed at him amazedly. He sat at the desk in the inner office, surrounded by books, medical magazines, foreign reviews in both French and German, as Chester discovered on approaching more closely, by loose anatomical plates, by sheets of paper covered with rough sketches of something—it looked more like a snake in convulsions than anything else. Evidently Burns was deep in some sort of professional research.

It was not that the sight was an unaccustomed one. There could be no question that R. P. Burns, M.D., was a close student; this was not the first nor the fortieth time that his friend had thus discovered him. The view to be had from the point where Chester stood, of the small laboratory opening from this office, was also a familiar one. He could see steam arising from the sterilizer: he knew surgical instruments were boiling merrily away there. A table was littered with objects suggesting careful examination: a fine microscope in position; a centrefuge, Bunsen burners, test-tubes; elsewhere other apparatus of a description to make the uninitiated actively sympathetic with the presumable coming victim.

The point of the situation to Chester was the astonishing fact that Burns could hear unmoved of the immediate departure of Ellen Lessing. He made up his mind that this scientific enthusiast could not have assimilated the dreadful news; he would try again.

"Red! Do you hear? She's going to-morrow —to-morrow!"

"Let her go. Don't bother me."

"I don't mean Pauline. Ellen's going, too."

Burns put up one sinewy hand and thrust it through his hair, which already stood on end. His collar was off and he wore a laboratory apron: his appearance was not prepossessing. He pulled a piece of paper toward him and began to make rapid lines. It was the snake again, in worse convulsions than before. Evidently he had not heard. Chester approached the desk.

"Red!" he shouted. "The patient isn't on the table yet: he won't die if you listen to me one minute. I want you to take this thing in. *Mrs. Lessing——*"

Knocking the sketch to one side and precipitating three books and a mass of papers to the floor, Red stood up. He towered above his shrinking friend, wrath in his eye. His lips moved. If it had been three months earlier Chester would have expected to hear language of a lurid description. As it was, the first syllable or two did slip out, but no more followed. Only speech—good, vigorous Saxon, not to be misunderstood.

"Will you try to get it into your brain that I don't care a hang who goes or where, so long as I figure out a way to do this trick? The other fellows all say it can't be done. Not one of 'em'll

do it, not even Van Horn. I say it can, and I'm going to do it to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, if I can work out a tool to do it with and make it. And I can do that if idiots like you will get out and keep out."

He sat down and was instantly lost again in his effort at invention. Chester looked at him in silence for a minute more, then he walked quietly out. Offended? Not he. He had not listened to invective from that Celtic tongue for eight years not to know that high tension over a coming critical operation almost invariably meant brilliant success. But even he had never seen Red Pepper keyed up quite so taut as this. It must be a tremendous risk he meant to take. Success to him—the queer, fine old boy!

"He may be over later when he gets that confounded snake of an instrument figured out." Chester offered this to the group upon his porch as consolation.

"And if he doesn't get it figured out before we break up, he won't be over," prophesied Macauley. "Ten to one he forgets to come and say good-bye before he starts for the hospital in the morning."

"I'm going to be standing beside the driveway

when he goes," vowed Pauline. "And if he doesn't notice me I'll climb on the car."

"Ellen, don't go to-morrow," whispered Martha Macauley to her sister. "Don't let it end this way. When he comes to, you'll be gone, and that's such a pity just now."

"But I think I would rather be gone, dear," Ellen Lessing whispered back.

"Oh, why? When Red's excited over a big success he's simply off his head—there's no knowing what he won't do."

"I prefer him when he has his head. Don't urge, Martha. I've promised to go in the morning with Pauline, and nothing could make me change."

"It's a shame for him to be so absorbed. Who wants a man who can forget the existence of a woman like that?"

"Who wants one who can't? A sorry surgeon he'd be—his hand would shake. Don't talk about it any more, dear. I'm going to enjoy this evening with you all. And I hope—oh, how I hope—that operation will be a success!"

If it were not to be a success it would not be the fault of the man who worked till one o'clock—two o'clock—three o'clock in the morning to

perfect the strangely convoluted tool which was to help "do the trick" if it could be done. Part of the work was done in the laboratory, part in the machine shop which occupied a corner of the old red barn, where the Green Imp lent her lamps as aids to the task in hand. At four, the instrument finished, sterilized, and put away as if it were worth its weight in gold—which it might easily have been if it were to prove fitted to the peculiar need—Burns went to bed. At six he was up again, had a cold plunge and a hearty breakfast, and at seven was sending the Imp out of the gateway, his office nurse beside him. If Mrs. Lessing hoped the operation would be a success, Miss Mathewson hoped and feared and longed with all her soul. Beneath the uniform and behind the quiet, plain face of the young woman who had been R. P. Burns's professional assistant for eight years, lived a person than whom none cared more how things went with him. But nobody knew that—least of all Burns himself. He only knew that he could not get on without her; that never a suture that she had prepared made trouble for him after an operation: and that none other of the hundred nice details

upon which the astounding results of modern surgery depend was likely to go wrong if it were she who was responsible.

At five o'clock that afternoon the Green Imp came back. Arthur Chester had just returned from the office and had thrown himself into a hammock on the porch, for the September weather was like that of June. Catching the throbbing purr of the Imp as the car swung in at the driveway Chester jumped up. Burns flung out a triumphant arm; Miss Mathewson was smiling.

"By George, the old boy's won out!" Chester said to himself, and hurried down to meet the Imp. "All over but the shouting, Red?" he questioned eagerly.

"All over." Burns's face was aflame.

"Pull up and tell me about it."

The car came to a standstill. "Nothing to tell. The curve I got on that bit of steel did the work, around the corner and inside out. The fellows said it wouldn't; stood around and croaked for an hour beforehand. Lord! I'd have died myself before I'd have failed after that."

"Should have thought they'd have unsettled your nerve," declared Chester, looking as if he

would like personally to pitch into the entire medical profession.

"Didn't. Just made me mad. I can do anything when I'm mad—if I can keep my mouth shut." Burns laughed rather shamefacedly. "That's the one advantage of a temper. I say, Ches, don't you want to go with me? There are probably half a dozen calls waiting at the office. I'll run and see."

He jumped out, seized his surgical handbags and hurried away. Miss Mathewson descended more deliberately, Chester plying her with eager questions as he assisted her. "How was it? Pretty big feather in his cap, Miss Mathewson?"

"Indeed it was, Mr. Chester. Every one of the other city surgeons said it couldn't be done without killing the patient. They all admitted that if she survived the operation she would have every chance for recovery. They were all there to see. I never knew them all there at once before."

"It would be ungenerous to imagine they wanted him to fail," chuckled Chester, "but we're all human. How did they take it when he succeeded?"

"They remembered they were gentlemen and scientists," declared Miss Mathewson—"all but one or two who aren't worth mentioning. When they saw he had done it, they began to clap. I don't believe there was ever such a burst of applause in that surgery."

"What did the old fellow do? Tried to look modest, I suppose," laughed Chester, glowing with pride and pleasure.

"He was white all through the operation—he always is, with the strain. But he turned red all over when they cheered, and just said: 'Thank you, gentlemen.' It really was a wonderful thing, Mr. Chester, even in these days. Only one man has done it, a German, and he has done it only twice. Doctor Burns will be distinguished after this."

"Good for him! No wonder he looks the way he does—as if he'd like to turn a few handsprings," Chester reflected as he watched the nurse's trim figure walk away.

Burns came back. "Jump in," he said. "Work enough to keep me busy till bedtime. If there hadn't been, I'd have proposed a beefsteak in the woods by way of a celebration and a let-

down. I'm beginning to get a bit of reaction, of course; should have liked an hour or two of jollity. You and Win, and Mrs. Lessing and I might have——"

"Mrs. Lessing! You old chump, don't you remember she's gone? Why, Mac started for the train with them all in his car, not ten minutes before you came. They haven't been gone fifteen. I begged off from going along because I was dusty and tired. Just got home myself."

R. P. Burns, making the circuit of the driveway behind the houses and now turning the Imp's nose toward the street again, stared at his friend in amazement.

"Why, she wasn't going till day after to-morrow!" he exclaimed.

"I came over last night," drawled Chester in a long-suffering tone, "and explained to you and shouted at you and tried in every way to ram the idea into your head that Pauline had wheedled Mrs. Lessing to start when she did, because their routes lay together as far as Washington. You put me out, calling me names and generally insulting me. It's all right, of course. She's to spend the winter in South Carolina, but she'll be

back next summer. You can say good-bye to her then. It'll do just as well."

Burns's watch was in his hand. "What time does that train go?" he demanded.

"Five-thirty. You can't make it." Chester's watch was also out. "What do you care? Send her a picture postcard explaining that you forgot all about her until it was too——"

The last word was jerked back into his throat by the jump of the Green Imp. She shot out of the driveway like a stone out of a catapult, and was off down the mile road to the station. All conveyances going to that train had passed a quarter-hour before, and the course was nearly clear.

"There's the train's smoke at the tunnel. You can't do it," asserted Chester, pointing to the black hole a few rods to one side of the station whence a gray cloud was issuing. "She only makes a two-minute stop. You won't more than get on board before——"

"If I get on board you drive into the city and meet me there, will you?" begged Burns.

"I can't drive the Imp, Red; you know I can't."

"Then 'phone Johnny Caruthers from the sta-

tion and send him in for me. That'll give me fifteen minutes on the train."

"What's the use? Pauline'll be at your elbow every minute. She'll——"

But Burns was paying no attention. He was taking the Imp past a lumbering farm-wagon with only two inches to spare between himself and the ditch. Then the car was at the station, Burns was out and through the building, through the gate and upon the slowly-moving train after a moment's hasty argument with a conductor to whom he could show no ticket. On the platform James Macauley, Junior, and Martha Macauley, Winifred Chester, and four small children of assorted ages stared after the big figure bolting into the Pullman. Bobby Burns gave a shriek of delight followed by a wail of disappointment.

"By George, he's turned up, after all!" exulted Macauley, and the two women looked at each other with meaning, relieved glances.

In the car, the passengers observed interestedly the spectacle of a large man with a mop of fiery red hair, from which he had pulled a leather cap, striding, dust-covered, into the car and up to the two prettiest young women there. One of these

very smartly clad in blue, received him with looks half gay, half pouting, and with a storm of talk. The other, in gray, with a face upon which no eye could rest once without covertly or openly returning in deference to its charm, gave him a quiet hand and turned away again to wave her farewell to the group of friends on the platform.

"Take my chair and I'll perch on the arm of Ellen's," commanded Pauline, "while you explain, apologize and try to make your peace with us. You'll find it hard work. I may smile for the sake of appearances, but inside I'm really awfully angry. So is Ellen, though she doesn't show it."

Thus Pauline, indefinitely prolonged and repeated, with variations, interpolations, interruptions. It didn't matter; Redfield Pepper Burns heard none of it. Even with Pauline "perching" on the arm of Ellen Lessing's chair, her face within eight inches of the other face, she was not within the field of his vision.

"I am sure the operation was successful," said Mrs. Lessing.

"One can see it in his eyes," declared Pauline. "I never knew hazel eyes could be so brilliant——"

"It went through," admitted Burns. "It had to, you know. And I had a thing to make last evening——"

"Arthur told us about it," chattered Pauline. "It was like a sna——"

"You didn't miss my not coming over," said Burns. He was leaning forward, his hands on his knees, his rumpled head near enough so that very low tones could reach the person to whom he spoke. He did not once look at Pauline. One would have thought that that fact alone would have quieted her, but it did not.

"Indeed we did—awfully!" cried Pauline. "We——"

"Neither did I myself, then, Mrs. Lessing. I miss it now. I shall miss it more whenever I think about it. I don't know of but one thing that can possibly make it up to me——"

"Name it! You don't deserve it, but our hearts are rather tender, and we might grant—" Pauline looked arch. But what was the use? Nobody saw. Even the passengers were watching the one in gray. Spectators always watch the woman at whom the man is looking. And in this case it seemed well worth while, for even the most

admirable reserve of manner could not control the tell-tale colour which was slowly mounting under the direct and continued gaze of the man with the red hair. The man himself, it occurred to more than one passenger, was rather well worth study.

"It's always been a theory of mine that no woman can know a man until she's exchanged letters with him for a considerable period of time—say, a winter," Burns went on. Pauline made some sort of an exclamation, but he failed to notice it—"Neither can a man know a woman. It's a stimulating experience. Suppose we try it?"

"How often do you propose to write to us?" inquired Pauline.

Now, at last, Red Pepper Burns looked at her. If she had known him better, she would have known that all his vows to keep his tongue from certain words were at that moment very nearly as written in water. But the look he gave her stung her for an instant into silence.

"I shall want to hear about Bob," Ellen replied, "all you can tell me. I have promised to write to him. You will have to read the letters

aloud to him—which will give you a very fair idea of what I am doing. But if you care for an extra sheet for yourself—now and then——"

"An extra sheet! When I am in the mood I am likely to write a dozen sheets to you. When I'm not, a page will be all you'll care to read. Will you agree to the most erratic correspondence you ever had, with the most erratic fellow?"

"It sounds very promising," she answered, smiling.

The train drew into the city station. The stop was a short one, for the Limited was late. In the rush of outgoing and incoming passengers Burns managed, for the space of sixty seconds, to get out of range of Pauline's ears.

"I shall count the hours till I get that first letter," said he.

She looked up. "You surely don't expect a letter till you have sent one?"

He laughed. "I'm going home to begin to write it now," he said.

Pauline accompanied him to the vestibule where he shook hands with her forgivingly. From the platform he secured a last glimpse of the other face, which gave him a friendly smile

as he saluted with his dusty leather cap held out toward her at the length of his arm. When he could no longer see her he drew a gusty sigh and turned away.

As he stood at the street entrance of the big station, waiting for Johnny Caruthers and the Green Imp, this is what he was saying to himself:

"Red, you've made more than one woman unhappy, to say nothing of yourself, by making love to her because she was a beauty and your head swam. This time you've tried rather hard to do her the justice to wait till you know. Only time and absence can settle that. Remember you found a nest of gray hairs in your red pate this morning? That should show that you're gaining wisdom at last, the salt in the red pepper, 'the seasoning of time,' eh, R. P.? But by the rate of my pulse at this present moment I'm inclined to believe—it's going to be a bit hard to write an absolutely sane letter. Perhaps it would be safer if I knew Pauline Pry would see it! I'll try to write as if I knew she would. . . . But by the spark I thought I saw in those black eyes I don't really imagine Pauline will!"

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH HE SUFFERS A DEFEAT

THE hands of the office clock were pointing to half after two, on a certain September night, when Burns came into his office, alone. The fire in the office fireplace, kept bright until nearly midnight, when his housekeeper had given up waiting for him and gone to bed, had burned to a few smouldering lumps of cannel-slag. A big leather easy-chair, its arms worn with much use, had been pulled into an inviting position before the fireplace, and the night-light by the desk was burning, as usual. All that could be expected had been done by the kind-hearted Cynthia, who comprehended, by signs she knew well and had been watching for several days, that affairs were going wrong with her employer.

But he needed more than could be given him by things inanimate—needed it woefully. He came in as a man comes who is not only physically

weary to the point of exhaustion, but heart-sick and sore besides. He dropped his heavy surgical bags upon the floor by the desk as if he wanted never to take them up again, pulled off coat and cap and let them fall where they would, then stumbled blindly over to the big chair and sank into it with a great sigh, as if he had reached the end of all endeavour.

If it had been physical fatigue alone which had brought him to this pass he might have dropped asleep where he sat, and waked, after an hour or two, to drag himself away to bed, like one who had been drugged. For a short space, indeed, he lay motionless in the chair in the attitude of one so spent for sleep that he must needs find it in the first place his body touches. But there are times when the mind will not let the body rest. And this was one of them.

The scene he had left lately was burning before his tired eyes; the sounds he had lately heard were beating in his brain. For a week he had been putting every power he possessed into the attaining of an end for which it had more than once seemed to him that he would be willing to sacrifice his own life. He had dared everything,

fought every one, had his own way in spite of every obstacle, believing to the last that he could win, as he had so often won before, by sheer contempt of danger. But this time he had failed.

That was all there was of it—he had failed, failed so absolutely, so humiliatingly, so publicly —this was the way he put it to himself—that he was in disgrace. He had operated when others advised against operation—and had seemed to succeed, brilliantly and incredibly. Then the case had begun to go wrong. He had operated a second time—against all precedent, taking tremendous risks—and had lost.

But this was not the worst. He had lost cases before and had suffered keenly over them, but not as he was suffering now. In a world of death some cases must be lost, even by the most successful of all of his profession. But this was an unusual case. This was . . . O God . . . how could he bear losing this one?

He had known her from a little girl of eight till now, when at sixteen, bright, beautiful, winsome sixteen, he had . . . what had he done? She might have had a chance for life—without operation. He had taken that chance away.

And she had trusted him—how she had trusted him! Ah, there was the bitter drop in the cup—the turn of the knife in the raw wound. When the others had opposed, she had looked up at him with that smile of hers—how could she smile when she was in such pain?—and whispered: "Please do whatever *you* want to, Doctor Burns." And he had answered confidently: "Good for you, Lucile—if only they'd all trust me like that I'd show them what I could do!"

Vain boast—wild boast! He had been a fool—twice a fool—thrice a fool! He was a fool clear through—that was the matter with him—a proud fool who had thought that with a thrust of his keen-edged tools he could turn Death himself aside.

And when he had tried his hand a second time, in the last futile effort to avert the impending disaster, she had trusted him just the same. When he had said to her, speaking close to her dull ear: "Dear little girl, I'm going to ask you to go to sleep again for me," she had turned her head upon the pillow, that tortured young head—he would not have thought she could move it at

all—and had smiled at him again . . . for the last time . . . He would remember that smile while he lived.

He got up from his chair as the intolerable memory smote him again, as it had been smiting him these three hours since the end had come. He began to pace the floor, back and forth—back and forth. There were those who said that R. P. Burns threw off his cases easily, did not worry about them, did not take it to heart when they went wrong. It is a thing often said of the men who must turn from one patient to another, and show to the second no hint of how the first may be faring. Those who say it do not know—can never know.

The hours wore on. Burns could not sleep, could not even relax and rest. To the first agony of disappointment succeeded a depression so profound that it seemed to him he could never rise above it and take up his work again. A hundred times he went painfully over the details of the case, from first to last. Why had he done as he had? Why had he not listened to Grayson, to Van Horn, to Fields? Only Buller had backed him up in his decisions—and he knew well

enough that Buller had done it only because of his faith in Burns himself and his remembrance of some of his extraordinary successes, not because his own judgment approved.

Five o'clock—six o'clock—he had thrown himself into the chair again, and had, at last, dropped into an uneasy sort of half slumber, when the office door quietly opened and Miss Mathewson came in. It was two hours before she was due. Burns roused and regarded her wonderingly, with eyes heavy and blood-shot. She stood still and looked down at him, sympathy in her face. She herself was pale with fatigue and loss of sleep, for she had been with him throughout the week of struggle over the case he had lost, and she knew the situation as no one else, even his professional colleagues, knew it. But she smiled wanly down at him, like a pitying angel.

"You didn't go to bed, Doctor," she said, very gently. "I was afraid you wouldn't. Won't you go now? You know there's a day's work before you."

He shook his head. "No—I'd rather get out in the air. I'm going now. *I'd like to take the Imp and—drive to——*"

"No, no!"—She spoke quickly, coming closer, as if she understood and would not let him use the reckless, common phrase which sometimes means despair. "I thought you might be feeling like that—that's why I came early. Not that I can say anything to cheer you, Doctor Burns—I know you care too much for that. But there's one thing you must realize—you must say it over and over to yourself—you did your best. No human being can do more."

"A fool's best," he muttered. "Cold comfort that."

"Not a fool's best—a skilful surgeon's best."

He shook his head again, got slowly up from his chair, and stood staring down into the ashes of the long-dead fire. The usually straight shoulders were bent; the naturally well-poised head, always carried confidently erect, was sunk upon the broad chest.

Amy Mathewson watched him for a minute, her own face full of pain; then laid her hand, rather timidly, upon his arm. He looked round at her and tried to smile, but the effort only made his expression the more pitiful.

"Bless your heart," said he, brokenly, "I

believe you'd stand by me to the last ditch of a failure."

Her eyes suddenly filled. "I'd let you operate —on my mother—to-day," said she, in a low voice.

He gazed into her working face for a long moment, seized her hand and wrung it hard, then strode away into the inner office and flung the door shut behind him.

A half-hour later he came out. He had himself sternly in hand again. His shoulders were squared, his head up; in his face was written a peculiar grim defiance which those who did not comprehend might easily mistake for the stoicism imputed to men of his calling under defeat. Miss Mathewson knew better, understood that it was taking all his courage to face his work again, and realized as nobody else could that the day before him would be one of the hardest he had yet had to live. But she was hopeful that little by little he would come back to the same recognition of that which she felt was really true, that, in spite of the results, he had been justified in the risk he had taken, and that he could not be blamed that conditions which only a superhuman pene-

tration could have foreseen would arise to thwart him.

"Cynthia has your breakfast ready for you, Doctor," Miss Mathewson said quietly, as he came out. She did not look up from the desk, where she was working on accounts. But as he passed her, on his way to the dining-room, he laid his hand for an instant on her shoulder, and when she looked up she met his grateful eyes. She had given him the greatest proof of confidence in her power, and it had been the one ray of light in his black hour.

"Won't you take just a taste o' the chops, Doctor?" urged his housekeeper, anxiously. She knew nothing of the situation, but she had not served him for eight years not to have learned something of his moods, and it was clear to her that he had had little sleep for many nights.

But he put aside the plate. "I know they're fine, Cynthia," said he in his gentlest way. "But the coffee's all I want, this morning. Another cup, please."

Cynthia hesitated, a motherly sort of solicitude in her homely face. "Doctor, do you know you've had four, a'ready? And it's awful strong."

"Have I! Well—perhaps that's enough. Thank you, Cynthia."

His housekeeper looked after him, as he left the room. "He's terrible blue, to be so polite as that," she reflected. "When he's happy he's in such a hurry he don't have time to thank a body. Of the two, I guess I'd rather have him hustlin' rude!"

In the middle of the day Burns met Van Horn.

"Sorry the case went wrong, Doctor," said his colleague. There was a peculiar sparkle in his eye as he offered this customary, perfunctory condolence.

"Thank you," replied Burns, shortly.

"I didn't wish to seem skeptical, and you certainly have had remarkable success in somewhat similar cases. But it seemed to me that in advising as I did I was holding the only safe ground. Personally I'm not in favour of taking chances—and in this case it seemed to me they were pretty slim."

"They were."

"I did my best to assure the family that you were within your rights."

"Much obliged."

"I don't blame you for feeling broken up about it," declared the other man, soothingly. "But we all have to learn by experience, and conservatism is one of the hardest lessons."

An ugly light was growing in Red Pepper's eye. He got away without further words. Only last week Van Horn had been helped out of a serious and baffling complication by Burns himself, and no credit given to the rescuer. From him this sort of high and mighty sympathy was particularly hard to bear.

Around the corner he encountered Grayson. This, as it was so little to be desired, was naturally to be expected.

"Too bad, Doctor," Grayson began, stopping to shake hands. Van Horn had not even shaken hands. "I hoped till the last that we were all wrong and you were right. But that heart seemed dangerously shaky to me, though I know you didn't think so."

"I didn't."

"There was a queer factor in the case, one I felt from the first, though I couldn't put my finger on it. It was the thing that made me advise against operation."

"I understand."

"But of course there's no use crying over spilt milk; you did your best," continued Grayson cheerfully. "Pretty little girl—plucky, too. Sorry to see her go."

Burns nodded—and bolted. These Job's comforters—were they trying to make the thing seem even more unbearable than it already was? Certainly they were succeeding admirably. He went on about his work with set teeth, expecting at the next turn to run into Fields. He would undoubtedly find him at the hospital, ready to greet him with some croaking sympathy. True to his expectations Fields met him at the door. He himself was looking particularly prosperous and cheerful, as people have a way of appearing to us when our trouble is not theirs.

"Good morning, Doctor." Fields shook hands, evidently trying to modify his own demeanour of unusual good cheer over a list of patients all safely on the road to ultimate recovery. "I want to express my regret over the way things came out last night. Mighty pretty operation—if it had succeeded. Sorry it didn't. Better luck next time."

"Much obliged." Burns had a bull-dog expression now. Not the most discerning observer would have imagined he felt a twinge of regret over his failure.

"Would you mind telling me what made you so confident that the spleen had nothing to do with the complication?" Fields inquired in a deprecatory manner which made Burns long to twist his neck.

"Did you suggest that it did—beforehand?"

"I believe I did—if I remember."

"I believe you didn't—nor any other man—till I got in and found it. You all observed it then—and so did I. Excuse me—I'm in too much of a hurry to stop to discuss the case now. I'm due upstairs." And once more Burns made good his escape.

"Sore," was Fields's verdict, looking after the man who had been his successful rival for so long that this exception could hardly fail to afford a decided, if rather shame-faced satisfaction to a brother surgeon not above that quite human sentiment.

But in the course of the day Burns met Buller. He had dreaded to meet him, but not for the

same reason that he had dreaded the others. Meeting Buller was quite another story.

"Old boy, I'm so sorry I could cry, if it would do you any good," said Buller, his steady, honest gaze meeting his friend's miserable eyes. For the defiance had melted out of Burns's aspect and left it frankly wretched before the hearty friendship in this man's whole attitude; friendship which could be counted upon, like that of his office nurse's, to the end of all things.

Burns swallowed hard, making no reply, because he could not. But his hand returned the steady pressure of Buller's in a way that showed he was grateful.

"I knew you'd take it hard—much harder than common. And, of course, I understand why. Any man would. But I wish I could make you feel the way I do about it. There's not one particle of reason for you to blame yourself. I've thought the case over and over from start to finish, and I'm more and more convinced that—she wouldn't have lived without the operation. You gave her her only chance. Take that in? I mean it. I went around there this morning and told the family so—I took that liberty.

It was a comfort to them, though they believed it anyway. They haven't lost a particle of faith in you."

Burns bit his lip till he had it under control, and could get out a word or two of gratitude.

"And now I want a favour of you," the other went on hurriedly. "A case I want you to see with me—possible operation within a day or two."

Burns hesitated an instant, changing colour. Then: "Are you sure you'd better have me?" he asked, a trifle huskily.

The other looked him in the eye. "Why not? I know of nobody so competent. Come, man—put that Satan of unreasonable self-reproach behind you. When man becomes omniscient and omnipotent there'll be no errors in his judgment or his performance—and not before. Meanwhile we're all in the soup of fallibility together. I—I'm not much at expressing myself elegantly: but I trust I'm sufficiently forcible," smiled Buller. "Er—will you meet me at four at my office? We'll go to the Arnold's together, and I'll give you the history of the case on the way. It's a corker, I assure you, and it's keeping me awake nights."

Proceeding on his way alone in the Imp—he had not wanted even Johnny Caruthers's company to-day—Burns found the heaviness of his spirit lifting slightly—very slightly. Tenderness toward the little lost patient who had loved and trusted him so well began gradually to usurp the place of the black hatred of what he felt to be his own incompetency. Passing a florist's shop he suddenly felt like giving that which, as it had occurred to him before, had seemed to him would be only a mockery from his hands. He went in and selected flowers—dozens and dozens of white rosebuds, fresh and sweet—and sent them, with no card at all, to her home.

Then he drove on to his next patient, to find himself surrounded by an eager group of happy people, all rejoicing in what appeared to them to be a marvelous deliverance from a great impending danger, entirely due to his own foresight and skill. He knew well enough that it was Nature herself who had come to the rescue, and frankly told them so. But they continued to thrust the honour upon him, and he could but come away with a softened heart.

"I'll go on again," he said to himself. "I've

got to go on. Last night I thought I couldn't, but, of course, that's nonsense. The best I can—God knows I try . . . And I'll never make *that* mistake again. . . . *But oh!—little Lucile—little Lucile!*"

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH HE PROVES HIMSELF A HOST

"WINIFRED," said R. P. Burns, invading Mrs. Arthur Chester's sunny living-room one crisp October morning, leather cap in hand, "I'm going to give a dinner to-night. Stag dinner for Grant, of Edinburgh—man who taught me half the most efficient surgery I know. He's over here, and I've just found it out. Only been in the city two days: goes to-morrow."

"How interesting, Red! Where do you give it? At one of the clubs or hotels in town?"

"That's the usual thing, of course. That's why I'm not going to do it. Grant's a rugged sort of common-sense chap—hates show and fuss. He gets an overpowering lot of being 'entertained' in precisely the conventional style. He's a pretty big gun now, and he can't escape. When I told him I was going to have him out for a plain dinner at home he looked as relieved as if I'd offered him a reprieve for some sentence."

"Undoubtedly he'll enjoy the relaxation. But you'll have a caterer out from town, I suppose?"

"Not on your life. Cynthia can cook well enough for me, and I know Ronald Grant's tastes like a book. But what I want to ask is that you and Martha Macauley will come over and see that the table looks shipshape. Cynthia's a captain of the kitchen, but her ideas of table decoration are a trifle too original even for me. Miss Mathewson's away on her vacation. I'll send in some flowers. My silver and china are nothing remarkable, but as long as the food's right that doesn't matter."

"I shall be delighted to do it for you, Red, as you know. So will Martha. We——"

"Thanks immensely. I want Ches, of course, and Jim Macauley's coming. The rest are M. D.'s. I must be off."

He would have been off, without doubt, in an instant more, for he was half out of the door as he spoke, but Winifred Chester flew after him and laid an insistent hand on his coat sleeve.

"Red! You must stop long enough to tell me something about it. How can I help you unless I know your plans? What hour have you

set? How many are coming, and who? How many courses are you going to have? Have you engaged a waitress?"

Red Pepper looked bewildered. "Is there all that to it?" he inquired helplessly. "How in thunder—I beg your pardon—how do I know how many courses there'll be? Ask Cynthia that. The hour's seven-thirty; can't get around earlier, even if I wanted to be less formal. There's Van Horn and Buller and Fields and Grayson and Grant and Ches and Jim and—and—myself. I may have asked somebody else, seems as if I did, but I can't remember. You'd better put on an extra plate in case I have."

He was starting off again, but Winifred, laughing helplessly, again detained him. "Red, you're too absurd! What about the waitress? Shall I find one for you?"

"I suppose Cynthia could serve us; she always does me."

"She can't to-night, and prepare things to send in, too."

"Oh, well, see to it if you'll be so kind; only let me go, for I've only fifteen minutes now to meet a consultant ten miles away. Good-bye, Win."

He took time to turn and smile at her, and for the sake of the smile—she knew of none other just like it—she forgave him for involving her in the labours she already clearly foresaw were to be hers. How precisely like Red Pepper Burns it was to plan for a "stag" dinner in this inconsequent way! If it had been a coming operation, now, no detail of preparation would have been too insignificant to command his attention. But in the present instance unquestionably all he had done was to appear at the door of the kitchen and casually inform Cynthia that eight or nine men were coming to dinner to-night, and he'd trust her to see that they should have something good to eat. Poor Cynthia!

Winifred ran over to consult Martha Macauley and together they braved Burns's housekeeper in her kitchen. The result was relief, as far as the dinner itself was concerned. Cynthia was a superior cook, and long experience with exclusively masculine tastes had taught her the sort of thing which, however out of the beaten line for entertaining, was likely to prove successful in pleasing "eight or nine men," wherever they might hail from.

"Cynthia's planned a dinner that will be about as different from Lazier's concoctions as could be imagined," Winifred said to Martha, "but it will taste what Ches calls 'licking good.' Now for the table. I'm afraid Red's china and linen are none too fine. We'll have to help him out there."

They helped him out. Only the finest of Martha's linen and silver, the thinnest of Winifred's plates and cups and the most precious of her glass would content them. When the table was set in the low-ceiled, casement-windowed old dining-room where Red Pepper was accustomed to bolt his meals alone when he took time for them at all, it was a table to suggest arrogantly the hand of woman. Winifred eyed it with mingled satisfaction and concern.

"It looks lovely, Martha, but not a bit bachelor-like. Do you suppose he'll mind?"

"Not as long as the food is right; and judging by the heavenly smells from the kitchen there's no fear for that. But it's five o'clock, and the flowers he promised you haven't come. Do you suppose he's forgotten?"

"Of course he has. If he remembers the dinner itself it'll be all we can expect of him. It doesn't

matter. There are heaps of pink and crimson asters yet in the garden, and some fall anemones. We'll arrange them, and then if his flowers do come we'll change. But they won't."

They didn't. But the pink and crimson asters furnished a centrepiece decidedly more in keeping, somehow, with a men's dinner than roses would have been, and the decorators were content with them. Dora, Mrs. Macauley's own serving-maid, who was to take the part of the waitress Red Pepper had not thought necessary, said they looked "awful tasty now."

"It's after seven and Red hasn't come yet." Winifred Chester rushed at Arthur, dressing placidly. "Jim went in for the men with his car, and said he'd surely have them here by seven-twenty. You'll have to go over and do the honours for him till he comes. He'll have to dress after he gets here."

"He won't stop to dress—not if he's late," predicted Chester, obediently hastening. "He'll rush in at the last minute, smelling horribly of antiseptics, and set everybody laughing with some story. They won't care what he wears. It's always a case of 'where MacGregor sits, there's

the head of the table,' you know, with Red. I certainly hope nothing will make him late. I'm not up to playing host to a lot of physicians and surgeons. I should feel as if I were about to be operated on."

"Nonsense, dear, there's no jollier company when they're off duty. But Red isn't here yet, and I'm sure I hear Jim's Gabriel down the road. Do hurry!"

Chester ran across the back lawn and in through Burns's kitchen, startling Cynthia so that she nearly dropped the salt-box into a sauce she was making for the beefsteak. He reached the little front porch just in time to welcome the batch of professional gentlemen who came talking and laughing up the path together.

"Doctor Burns has been detained, but I'm sure he'll be here soon," Chester explained, shaking hands, and discovering for himself which was the famous Scottish surgeon by the "rugged common-sense" look of the man, quite as R. P. Burns had characterized him.

Seven-thirty—no Red Pepper. Seven-forty-five—eight o'clock—still no sign of him; harder to be explained, no sign from him. Why didn't

he telephone or send a telegram or a messenger? Waiting longer would not do; Cynthia, in the kitchen, was becoming unnervingly agitated.

The dinner was served. Chester, at one end of the table, Macauley at the other, both feeling a terrible responsibility upon them, did their best. There had turned out to be two extra guests instead of the one whom Burns had thought he might have asked but couldn't be sure; and Winifred had had a bad ten minutes looking out a full set of everything with which to set his place. For Red Pepper's place must certainly be left unfilled; it would be beyond the possibilities that the dinner should end without him.

"I believe he has forgotten," whispered Martha to Winifred in the office, from whose dim shadows they were surreptitiously peering into the dining-room to make sure that everything was going properly.

"Oh, he couldn't, not with the Edinburgh man here. He's often told us about Doctor Grant and how much he owes him. He does look splendid and capable, doesn't he—for all he's so burly and homely? And the other men all feel honoured to be here with him; even Doctor

Van Horn, who's always so impressed with himself."

"They seem to be having a good time. And they're eating as if they never saw food before. It's a success—as much as it can be without the host himself. Oh, why doesn't Red come?"

"He wouldn't desert a patient in a crisis for a dozen dinners."

"No, but he'd send word."

"Look at Arthur. He's hobnobbing with Doctor Grant is if he'd always known him."

"Jim is having a bad time with Doctor Van Horn. I can see it in his eye. Mercy! one of them looked this way. I'm afraid he saw me. Come!"

The next time they reconnoitred, the dinner was working toward its end. It was time, for it was nearly ten o'clock, and Cynthia's courses, though not many, had been mighty. Presently the table had been cleared, and the men were drinking coffee and lighting the excellent cigars which had been Macauley's thought when he found that Red Pepper was not on hand to provide them himself.

Under the influence of these genial stimulants

—Burns never offered any others, and one man who knew it had declined to come—the sociability grew more positive. Chester relaxed his legs under the table, feeling that at last Red's guests could take care of themselves. Grayson proved an accomplished story-teller; Buller had lately had some remarkable adventures; even Ronald Grant, who had seemed a trifle taciturn, related an extraordinary experience of another man. The Scottish surgeon had the reputation of never talking about himself.

The smoke grew thick. Macauley's cigars were of a strong brand; the air was blue with their reek. Still the guests sat about the table, and still the talk went on.

It was interrupted quite suddenly by the advent of Red Pepper Burns himself. Macauley saw him first, standing in the doorway between dining-room and office, but for an instant he did not know him. Macauley's startled look caught Chester's attention; he sprang to his feet. At the same moment the Scottish surgeon, following Chester's eyes, observed the figure in the door. He was first to reach it.

"What's happened ye, lad?" he asked, and

acted without waiting for an answer. He threw a powerful arm about Burns's shoulders and led him, reeling, back into the office where the air was purer.

They crowded round, doctors though they were and had many times sharply ordered other people not to crowd. They could see at a glance that Burns was very faint, that his right arm hung helpless at his side, that his forehead wore a blackening bruise, and that his clothes were torn and covered with dirt. For the rest they had to wait.

Grant took charge of his friend—the pupil whom he had never forgotten. The arm was badly broken, too badly to be set without an anæsthetic. In the inner office Van Horn, his dress coat off, gave the chloroform while the Scotchman set the arm; and the American surgeons, no longer crowding, but standing off respectfully as if at a clinic, looked on critically. It was rapid and deft work, they admitted, especially since the surgeon was using another man's splints, and the patient proved to be one of the subjects who fight the anæsthetic from beginning to end.

Chester, white-faced but plucky, stuck it out, but Macauley fled to the outer air. Seeing a

familiar long, dark form half on, half off the driveway, he hurried toward it. A minute later he had all the unoccupied guests around him on the lawn, and one of the Green Imp's lamps was turned upon its crippled shape.

"By George, he's had a bad accident," one and another of them said as they examined the car's injuries. The hood was jammed until they wondered why the engine was not disabled; the left running-board was nearly torn off and the fender a shapeless wreck. The green paint was scraped and splintered along the left side.

"He must have come home by himself. How far, do you suppose?"

"Not far, driving with his left hand, and faint."

"He probably wasn't faint till he struck the indoor heat and the tobacco smoke."

"He's come at least five miles. Look at that red clay on her sides. There's no red clay like that around here except in one place—at the old mill on the Red Bank road." Chester demonstrated his theory excitedly. "I ought to know, I've ridden with him on every out-of-the-way by-path in the county, first and last. There's a fright of a hill just there."

"Five miles with that arm? Gee!" This was Buller.

"Plucky," was Grayson's comment, and there was a general agreement among the men standing round.

Macauley put his shoulder to the Imp. "Let's push her in, fellows," he proposed. He had forgotten that they were medical gentlemen of position. "I don't seem to want to drive her just now," he explained.

They pushed the Imp to the red barn and shut it in with its injuries. Then they went back to the house, where presently Burns came out from under his anæsthetic and lay looking at his guests from under the bandage which swathed his head.

"I'm mighty sorry to have broken up the fun this way, gentlemen," he said with a pale sort of smile. "Grayson was telling a story when I butted in, I think. Finish it, will you, Grayson?"

"Not much. Yours is the story we want now, if you're up to telling it. What happened out there on the Red Bank road?"

Burns scanned him. "How do you know what road?"

"Your friend Mr. Chester's detective instincts.

He says there's no other red clay like that that plasters your car. By the way, that's a fast machine of yours. Did you lose control on the hill?"

"That's it," acknowledged Burns simply. "I lost control."

Chester was staring at him. It was not in the nature of reason to suppose that Red Pepper had lost control of that car unless something else had happened first. The steering gear of the Imp was certainly in perfect condition; Macauley had said so. He wondered if Red meant that he had lost his temper. But what could make him lose his temper—on Red Bank hill?

They questioned him closely, all of them in turn. But that was all he would say. He had lost control of the car. One or two of the men who knew Burns least looked as if they could tell what was the probable cause of such loss of control. Chester wanted to knock them down as he fancied he recognized this attitude of mind. And at last they went away—which was certainly the best thing they could do in the circumstances.

All but Ronald Grant. The Scottish surgeon accepted without hesitation Burns's suggestion

that Doctor Grant should stay and keep him company for an hour or two while he got used to his arm, and should then sleep under his roof. So they settled down, Burns on his couch, Grant in an armchair. When Chester left he was thinking that, except for the outward signs of his adventure, Burns did not look as unfit as might have been expected for a happy hour with an old friend.

Just outside the house Chester himself had an adventure. He was quite alone, and he almost ran into a slim figure on the walk. The lights from the office shone into the October night, and Chester could see at a glance who the girl was, even if the gleam of golden hair which all the town knew had not told him. She was panting and her hand was on her side.

"Did Doctor Burns get home all right?" she cried under her breath.

"What do you know about Doctor Burns?" was Chester's quick reply. He was startled by the girl's appearance here at this hour.

"It doesn't make any difference what I know. Tell me if he got home. Was he much hurt? Why shouldn't you tell me that, Mr. Chester?"

"He is home and all right. Do you want him professionally? He can't go out to-night."

"I know he can't. But I had to know he got home. I——"

She sank down on the doorstep, shaken and sobbing. Chester stood looking down at her, wondering what on earth he was to say. What had Rose Seeley to do with Red? What had she to do with his losing control on the Red Bank hill? A quick thought crossed his mind, to be as quickly dismissed. No, whatever Red's private affairs were, they could have nothing to do with this Rose—too bruised and trampled a rose to take the fancy of a man like him even in his most evil hour.

Suddenly she lifted her head. "He saved my life and 'most lost his. They'd been making repairs on the hill and, some way, the lanterns wasn't lit. It's an awful dark night. He saw what he was comin' to and turned out sudden into the grass. He had to go into the ditch, then, not to run over me—and somebody else. *He* ran away!" Plainly that scornful accent did not mean Burns. "I didn't. I helped him get the car up. I got his engine goin' for him; he showed

me how. His arm was broke. There ain't no house for a mile out there. I hated to see him try to come home alone. I've walked all the way—run some of it—to make sure he got here."

"He got here," murmured Chester, thinking to himself that this was the queerest story he'd ever heard, but confident he would never have any better version of it and pretty sure that it was the true one.

"I suppose I'm a crazy fool to tell you, Mr. Chester," said the girl thickly. "But you're a gentleman. You won't tell. No more will he. He didn't tell you how it happened, did he?"

She did not ask the question. She made the assertion, looking to him for confirmation. Chester gave it. "No, he didn't tell," he said gravely.

When she had gone he crossed the lawn to his own home, musing. "For a 'plain, quiet dinner,'" said he, quoting a phrase of Burns's used when he gave Chester the invitation, "I think Red's has been about as spectacular as they make 'em. Bully old boy!"

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH HE GETS EVEN WITH HIMSELF

R. P. BURNS sat at his desk in the inner office, laboriously inscribing a letter with his left hand. It did not get on well. The handwriting in the four lines he had succeeded in fixing upon paper bore not the slightest resemblance to his usual style; instead, it looked like the chirography of a five-year-old attempting for the first time to copy from some older person's script.

He held up the sheet and gazed at it in disgust. Then he glanced resentfully at his sling-supported right arm, especially at the fingers which protruded from the bandages in unaccustomed limp whiteness. Then he shook his left fist at it. "You'll do some work the minute you come out of those splints," he said. "You'll work your passage back to fitness quicker than an arm ever did before, you pale-faced shirk!"

Then he applied himself to his task, painfully forming a series of pothooks until one more

sentence was completed. He read it over, then suddenly crumpled the sheet into a ball and dropped it into the waste basket.

"Lie there!" he whimsically commanded it. "You're not fit to go to a lady."

He got up and marched into the outer office where his office nurse sat at a typewriter, making out bills.

"Miss Mathewson," he requested gruffly, "please take a dictation. No, not on the bill letterheads—on the regular office sheets. I'll speak slowly. In fact, I'll probably speak very slowly."

"I'm sorry I don't know shorthand," said Miss Mathewson, preparing her paper.

"I'm not. Instead, I'd rather you'd be as slow as you can, to give me time to think. I'm not used to transmitting mediums—the battery may be weak—in fact, I'm pretty sure it is. All ready? *My dear Mrs. Lessing":*

His cheek reddened suddenly as he saw the nurse's waiting hands poised over the keys when she had written this address. He cleared his throat and plunged in.

"This has been a typical November day, dull

and cold. We had fine October weather clear into the second week of this month, but all at once it turned cold and dull. The leaves are all off the trees— Hold on—don't say that. She knows the leaves are all off the trees the middle of November."

"I have it partly written."

"Oh! Well, go on, then; I'll fix it: *a fact it may be necessary to remind you of down there in South Carolina, where*— Miss Mathewson, do you suppose the leaves are on in South Carolina?"

"I really don't know, Doctor Burns. I have always lived in the North."

"So have I—bother it! Well, leave that out."

"But I've written *'a fact it may be necessary'* ——"

"Well, finish it: *a fact it may be necessary to remind you of, you have been gone so long.* Oh, hang it—that sounds flat! How can I tell how a sentence is coming out, this way? Let that paragraph stand by itself—we'll hasten on to something that will take the reader's mind off our unfortunate beginning:

"You will be glad to know that Bobby Burns is well, and not only well, but fat and hearty. He

had a wrestling bout with Harold Macauley the other day and downed him. He got a black eye, but that didn't count, though you may not like to hear of it. He is heavier than when you saw him —— Oh, I've said that! Miss Mathewson, when you see I'm repeating myself, hold me up."

"I can't always tell when you're going to repeat yourself," Miss Mathewson objected.

"That's enough about Bob, anyhow. Mrs. Macauley writes her all about him every week, only she probably didn't mention the black eye. Well, let's start a new paragraph. When in doubt, always start a new paragraph. It may turn out a gold mine.

"I found my work much crippled by the loss of my arm. Good heavens, that sounds as if I'd had it amputated! And I suppose she naturally would infer that a man can't do as much with his arm in a sling as he can when it's in commission. Well, let it stand. *I didn't realize how much surgery I was doing till I had to cut it all out.* 'Cut it out,' that certainly has a surgical ring! It sounds rather bragging, too, I'm afraid. Never mind. *The worst of it is to feel the muscles atrophying from disuse and the tissues wasting, so*

that when it comes out of the splints it will still have to be cured of the degeneration the splints have—— Oh, hold on, Miss Mathewson—this sounds like a paper for a surgical journal!"

Burns, who had been walking up and down the room, cast himself into an armchair and stared despairingly at his amanuensis. But she reassured him by saying quietly that it was always difficult to dictate when one was not used to it, and that the letter sounded quite right.

"Well, if you think so, we'll try another paragraph—that's certainly enough about me. Let me see——" He ran his left hand through his hair.

Footsteps sounded upon the porch. Arthur Chester opened the door.

"Oh, excuse me, Red. It's nothing. I was going for a tramp, and I thought——"

"I'm with you." Burns sprang to his feet looking immensely relieved. "Thank you, Miss Mathewson, we'll finish another time. Or perhaps I can scrawl a finish with my left hand. I'll take the letter. I'll look in at Bob and get my hat in a jiffy, Ches."

He seized the letter, ran into the inner office,

looked in at the dimly-lighted room where the boy was sleeping, took up a soft hat and, out of sight of Miss Mathewson, crammed the typewritten sheet into his pocket in a crumpled condition. Pulling the soft hat well down over his eyes he followed Chester out into the fresh November night, drawing a long breath of satisfaction as the chill wind struck him.

"You were just in time to save me from an awful scrape I'd got myself into," he remarked as they tramped away.

"I though you looked hot and unhappy. Were you proposing to Miss Mathewson by letter? It's always best to say those things right out: letters are liable to misinterpretation," jeered Chester.

"You're right there. I was riding for a fall fast enough when you reined up alongside. But what's a fellow to do when he can't write himself, except in fly-tracks?"

"I presume the lady would prefer the fly-tracks to a typewritten document executed by another woman."

"How do you know the thing was to a lady?" Burns demanded.

"That's easy. No man looks as upset as you did over a communication to another man. What do you write to her for, anyhow, when she's as near as Washington?"

"What?"

"Doesn't she keep you informed? Winifred says Martha says Ellen came back up to Washington yesterday for the wedding of a friend—hastily arranged—to an army officer suddenly ordered somewhere—old friend of Ellen's—former bridesmaid of hers, I believe. She——"

Burns had stopped short in the middle of the hubbly, half-frozen street they were crossing. "How long does she stay in Washington?"

"I don't know. Ask Win. Probably not long, since she only came for this wedding. It's tonight, I think she said. Aren't you coming?"

Burns walked on at a rapid stride with which Chester, shorter-legged and narrower-chested, found it difficult to keep up. They had their tramp, a four-mile course which they were accustomed to cover frequently together at varying paces. Chester thought they had never covered it quite so quickly nor so silently before. For Burns, from the moment of receiving Chester's news, appeared to fall into a reverie from which

it was impossible to draw him, and the subject of which his companion found it not difficult to guess. After the first half-mile, Chester, than whom few men were more adaptable to a friend's mood, accepted the situation and paced along as silently as Burns, until the round was made and the two were at Burns's door.

"Good night. Afraid I've been dumb as an oyster," was Burns's curt farewell, and Chester chuckled as he walked away.

"Something'll come of the dumbness" he prophesied to himself.

Something did. It was a telegram, telephoned to the office by a sender who rejoiced that having one's right arm in a sling did not obstruct one's capacity to send pregnant messages by wire. He had obtained the address from Martha Macauley, also over the telephone:

Mrs. E. F. Lessing, Washington, D. C.

Am leaving for Washington to-night. Hope to have drive with you to-morrow morning in place of letters impossible to write.

R. P. Burns."

"I suppose that's a fool telegram," he admitted to himself as he hung up the receiver, "but after

that typing mess I had to express myself somehow except by signs. Now to get off. Luckily, this suit'll do. No time to change, anyhow."

He telephoned for a sleeper berth; he called up a village physician and the house surgeon at the city hospital, and made arrangements with each for seeing his patients during the two nights and a day of his absence. He had no serious case on hand and, of course, no surgical work, so that it was easier to get away than it might be again for a year after his arm should be once more to be counted on. Then he interviewed Cynthia on the subject of Bob; after which he packed a small bag, speculating with some amusement, as he did so, on the succession of porters, bell-boys, waiters and hotel valets he should have to fee during the next thirty-six hours to secure their necessary assistance, from the fastening of his shoes to the tying of his scarfs, the cutting up of his food, and the rest of the hundred little services which must be rendered the man with his right arm in a sling.

"I may not look a subject for travel, Miss Mathewson," he announced with a brilliant smile, appearing once more in the outer office

where the bill-copying was just coming to a finish, "but I'm off, nevertheless. Thank you for your struggle with my schoolboy composition. We won't need to finish it. I'm—— Oh, thunder!"

It was the office bell. Miss Mathewson answered it. Burns, prepared to deny himself to all ordinary petitioners, saw the man's face and stopped to listen. It was a rough-looking fellow who told him his brief story, but the hearer listened with attention and his face became grave. He turned to Miss Mathewson.

"Call Johnny Caruthers and the Imp, please," he directed. "Telephone the Pullman ticket office and change my berth reservation from the ten-thirty to the one o'clock train."

He went out with the man, and Miss Mathewson heard him say: "You walked in, Joe? You can ride back with us on the running-board."

Ten minutes after he had gone Chester came again. He found Miss Mathewson reading by the office droplight. On the desk stood a travelling bag; beside it lay a light overcoat, not the sort that Red Pepper was accustomed to wear in the car, a dress overcoat with a silk lining. On it reposed a hat and a pair of gloves rolled into a

ball, man fashion. Chester regarded with interest these unmistakable signs of intended travel.

"Doctor Burns going out of town?" he inquired casually. It must be admitted that he had scented action of some sort on the wind which had taken his friend from his company at the conclusion of the walk. Ordinarily, Burns would have gone into Chester's den and settled down for an hour of talk before bedtime.

"I believe so," Miss Mathewson replied in the noncommittal manner of the professional man's confidential assistant. "But he has gone out for a call now."

"Back soon?"

"I don't know, Mr. Chester."

"Did he go in the Imp?"

"Yes."

"Country call, probably—they're the ones that bother a man at night as long as he does country work. I've often told Doctor Burns it was time he gave up this no-'count rural practice. Well, do you know what time his train goes?"

"After midnight, some time." Miss Mathewson knew that Mr. Chester was Doctor Burns's close friend, but she was too accustomed to keep

her lips closed over her employer's affairs to give information, even to Chester, except under protest.

"Hm! Well, I believe I'll sit up for him and help him off. A one-armed man needs an attendant. Don't stay up, Miss Mathewson. I'll take any message he may leave for you."

"I'm afraid I ought to wait," replied the faithful nurse doubtfully.

"I don't believe it. Go home and go to bed, like a tired girl, as you no doubt are, and trust me. If he wants you I promise to telephone you. I'll see him off and like to do it. Come!"

There being no real reason for doing otherwise than follow this most sensible advice, Miss Mathewson went away. Chester, settling himself by the drop-light in the chair she had vacated, fancied she looked a trifle disappointed and wondered why. Surely, he reasoned, the girl must get enough of erratic night work without sitting up merely to hand Burns his overcoat and wish him a pleasant journey.

It was a long wait. Chester enlivened it by telephoning Winifred that he wouldn't be home till morning—or sooner, and elicited a flurry of questioning which he evaded rather clumsily.

It was all right for him to be curious concerning Red's affairs, he considered, but there was no need for the women to get started on inquisitive questions.

He read himself asleep at last over the office magazines, and was awakened by a hurried step on the porch and a gust of November night air on his warm face.

"What are you doing here?" was the question which assaulted him.

"Sitting up for you," was Chester's sleepy reply. He rubbed his eyes. "Thought you might like to have me see you off."

"I'm not going anywhere except back to the case I've just left. Go home and go to bed."

Chester sat up. He looked at Burns with awakening interest. He had never seen his friend's face look grimmer than it did now under the gray slouch hat, which he had worn for the tramp, pulled well down over his brows, and which, during all his preparations and his hasty departure in the car, it had not occurred to him to remove or to exchange for the leather cap he usually wore on such trips.

"Back to a country case instead of to Washing-

ton?" Incredulity was written large on Chester's face.

Burns nodded, growing grimmer than before, if that were possible. He sat down on the arm of a chair, glancing over at the desk where his belongings lay. "How did you know I was going to Washington?"

"Inferred it."

"You're mighty quick at inference. Maybe I wasn't. But I was. Now I'm not. That's all there is to it."

"But why not? Can't you turn the case over? I'll bet my hat it's a dead-beat case at that!"

Burns nodded again. "It is."

"You're an ass, then."

"Perhaps."

"You don't expect—her—to stay in Washington waiting for you, do you, when she only came up for that wedding and is going straight back to keep some other engagements? That's what Win says she's to do."

"No, I don't expect her to wait." Burns pulled the slouch hat lower yet. Chester could barely see his eyes. He could only hear the tone of his denial of any such absurd expectation.

Chester rose and stood looking down at his friend, who had folded his left arm over his right in its sling, as he sat on the chair arm, and looked the picture of dogged resignation.

"I suppose there's some reason at the bottom of what strikes me as pure foolishness," he admitted. "You won't do me the honour of mentioning it?"

"Case of infected wound in the foot. Threatened tetanus. Five-year-old child."

"Nobody competent to treat the case but you?"

Burns looked up. Chester saw his eyes, now, gloomy but resolute. "No. It's up to me—alone. I owe it to the woman. It's the only child she has left: a girl. It was her boy I sent to a better world with maledictions on his mother's head."

Comprehension dawned at last on Chester's face. He saw that, taking into consideration Burns's feeling in that matter, there was really nothing to be said. "I hope you win out," he evolved at length from the confusion of ideas in his mind.

"I hope I do." Burns rose. "I must send a

telegram," he said, and went to the telephone in the inner office.

While he was there Chester heard the honk of the Imp's horn outside. When Burns came back he opened the outer door and called to Johnny Caruthers, to know if he had obtained the serum for which he had been sent to the druggist. Johnny shouted back that he had. Burns turned to Chester.

"Good-night," he said. "Much obliged for waiting up for me."

Then, with a certain fighting expression on his lips which Chester had learned to know meant that his whole purpose was set on the attainment of an end for which no price could be too great to pay, Burns went out to Johnny Caruthers and the Green Imp.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH HE HAS HIS OWN WAY

"DOC"—Joe Tressler followed Burns down the path, leaving his wife standing in the doorway, her eyes fixed on the retreating figure of the man who had saved to her her one remaining child—"Doc, we ain't a-goin' to forget this!"

"Neither am I, Joe, for various reasons," replied Burns, watching Johnny Caruthers try the Green Imp's spark. He jumped in beside Johnny and looked back at Joe. "Remember, now, keep things going just as I leave them, and I shall expect to find Letty nearly as well as ever when I see her again. I shall be back in five days. Good-bye."

"Doc!"

"Yes."

"I'll be around when you get back, with some money."

Burns looked the man in the eye. "Oh, come, Joe, don't say anything you don't mean."

"I mean it this time, Doc—I sure do. Me and the old woman—we—Letty——" The fellow choked.

"All right, Joe. I'm as glad as you are Letty's safe. Take care of her. Take care of your wife. Do a stroke of good, back-breaking work once in a while. It'll help that tired feeling of yours that's getting to be dangerously chronic. You've no idea, Joe, what a satisfaction it is, now and then, to feel that you've accomplished something. Try it. Good-bye."

He waved his hand at the woman in the door, who responded with a flutter of her dingy apron, which was immediately thereafter applied to her eyes. Within, by the window, a little pale-faced girl hugged a remarkable doll with yellow hair and a red silk frock.

"You'd ought to be pretty proud, Letty Tressler," said the woman, returning to the small convalescent, "to think Doc kissed you when he left. He's been awful good to you, Doc has, and him with that arm in a sling a-bothering him all the time. But I didn't think he'd do that."

"Maybe it's 'cause I'm so clean now," specu-

lated the child weakly. "When he did it he whispered in my ear that he liked clean faces."

"Letty, you ain't goin' to have any kind o' face but a clean face after this, jest on account o' Doc Burns," vowed her mother emotionally, and the child, her doll pressed against her face, nodded.

Far down the road Burns was bidding Johnny Caruthers put on more speed. "We have to make time to-day, Johnny," he explained. "I'm going to get off on that ten-thirty to-night if I have to break my other arm to do it. I don't know that I'd be much more helpless than I am now if I did. Curious, Johnny, how many things there are a man can't do with one hand."

"I should say you could do more with that left hand of yours than most folks can with both," declared young Caruthers, honest admiration in his eye.

Burns laughed—a hearty, care-free laugh. He was in wild spirits, Johnny could see that, and wondered why the Doctor should be so happy over pulling a dead-beat family out of their troubles. Everybody knew Joe Tressler. And Johnny understood that the Doctor had given up

going away on Joe's account ten days ago, when he took the case on the eve of his departure. Johnny had seen his employer in all stages of tension since that day, as he had driven him out, at first half-a-dozen times in the twenty-four hours, to this same little old wreck of a house. Johnny had driven him to other houses, also to one especially, in the city, where the lad had sat and speculated much on the extremes of experience in the life of a busy practitioner.

It was to this same house that Johnny took Burns next; a house reached by a long drive through wonderful grounds, to a palace of a home within which the man with his arm in the sling disappeared with precisely the same rather brusque and hurried bearing characteristic of him everywhere. But Johnny could not see within. If he had, his honest eyes might have opened still wider.

On his way upstairs Burns was intercepted by the master of the house.

"You've decided to go with us, Doctor Burns, I hope?" The question was put in the fashion of a person who expects but one answer. But the answer proved to be not that one expected.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do it, Mr. Walworth."

Burns's left hand, in the cordial grip which expresses hearty liking, was retained while William Walworth, who was accustomed to be able to arrange all things to his pleasure by the simple expedient of paying whatever it might cost, stared into the bright hazel eyes which met his with their usual straightforward glance.

"'Can't'! But you must, my dear Doctor. Pardon me, but I feel that no ordinary considerations can be allowed to stand in the way. My daughter needs your care on this journey. Her mother and I have agreed that her wish to have you with us must be fulfilled. It's an essential factor in her recovery."

"It's not essential at all, Mr. Walworth. Miss Evelyn is well started on the road to full health; she has only to keep on. My going with you would be a mere matter of pleasing her, and that's not in the least necessary."

His smile softened the words which struck upon the ear of the magnate with an unaccustomed sound. Mr. Walworth released Burns's hand, his manner stiffening slightly.

"I must differ with you, Doctor. I feel that

at this stage Evelyn's pleasure is a thing to be planned for. She has taken this fancy to have you with us on the Mediterranean cruise. We'll agree to land you and send you home at the end of a couple of months if you positively feel that you can't neglect your practice longer. But let me remind you, Doctor, that your fee will be made to cover all possible income from your practice during that time, and—I shall not be contented to measure its size by that."

It was Burns's turn to stiffen within, if he did not let it show outwardly. He spoke positively and finally. Even William Walworth saw that it would be of no use to urge a man who said quite quietly:

"I've thought it over, as I promised you, and decided against it. I assure you I appreciate the honour you would do me, and I should immensely like the experience. But I know my going is not necessary to Miss Evelyn's recovery, and that's the only thing that could make me hesitate. I'll go up and see her at once, if you will forgive my haste. I have a busy day before me."

William Walworth looked after him as he ran up the stately staircase, and his thoughts

were somewhat as Johnny Caruthers's had been. "He's more of a man, crippled like that, than any I know. I wonder why he won't go. I wonder. But he won't, that's settled. Now to appease Evelyn. He'll not find that so easy."

Burns did not find it easy. He sat down beside the convalescent, a patient who had everything on her side with which to win her chosen physician's consent to stay by her till she should be in the possession once more of the blooming beauty which had made her one of the envied of the earth. He told her, in the direct manner he had used with her father, that he could not fall in with their plans.

When he came away he was tingling all over. It had been so plain. She had tried to disguise it, but she was where she could not run to cover, and he had seen it all. It gave him no pleasure: he was not that sort. He was sorry for the girl, but he was not in the least anxious about her. She would get over it; it was not his fault—he was conscience-clear on that. If ever he had been coolly—however kindly—professional in his bearing it had been in this home of great wealth, where it would have gone against his

inmost grain to have seemed to court liking. If anything, his orders had been more curt, his concessions fewer, his whole treatment of the case on simpler lines than it might have been in almost any less pretentious home with which he was familiar.

He ran down the stone steps in eager haste to be gone, his vision still engaged with the reproachful look Evelyn's mother had given him when she heard of his incredible refusal to accompany the Walworths on the luxuriously-equipped expedition in search of recuperation and enjoyment for the idolized only daughter. "This settles me with them to the end of time, I suppose," he said to himself. As the car ran down the drive, he straightened his shoulders with a sense of thankfulness that his practice was not often in the homes of the comparatively few people who can afford to buy even that most precious of commodities, the time of others, when that time has been consecrated to certain uses.

"Not going to stop for lunch, Doctor?" inquired young Caruthers anxiously, as the round of calls went on and one o'clock passed, with the Imp in a portion of the city remote from the hotel at

which Burns was accustomed to refresh himself and Johnny when home was out of the question.

"We'll go to the hospital next, and I shall be there a couple of hours. You can go and fill up then. I must be back at the office by four—for engagements."

So the day went. The busy physician who goes out of town for even a five days' vacation must plan for it and do much arranging in various ways. In spite of the fact that it would still be many weeks before Burns could attempt surgery again, he was having plenty to do. Only the determination to get away this time without fail made it possible for him to go. But there would be never a time when he could better be spared, and he meant to let nothing hinder his purpose.

"The arm's coming on well," was Doctor Buller's verdict late that afternoon as he gave the healing member its usual manipulation and massage. "It takes patience to wait, though, doesn't it, Burns? Never tried a broken arm myself, but I should say that hand must be itching to be at work in the operating-room again."

"Itching! It's burning, blistering, scarifying! I never knew how I liked that part of my work

till I had to come down to an exclusive practice in pills and plasters. Grayson's doing a stunt to-day that would have driven me mad with envy if I could have stopped to look on. Doing it cleverly, too, by the report I had from Van Horn just now. When Van takes the trouble to praise another man it means something."

"Means it's been forced from him," commented Buller. "Besides, Van enjoys praising Grayson to you. He's enjoyed your smashed arm, too, the old fraud. Was he ever so decent to you before?"

Burns laughed. "You can't strike fire that way to-day," he declared. "Hold on! You're not going to put that arm back into the splints?"

"Of course I am. It lacks two days yet of the shortest modern regulation period. Come on here."

"Leave 'em off. I'll take the consequences."

"Don't be foolish, man. If I had my way I'd keep the thing put up another full week. I'm not an advocate of this hurry business."

"I am. The arm's well enough to come out. I'll wear it in a sling, but I want my coat sleeve on, and I'm going to have it on. Fix me up, will you? I'm in a hurry."

"You're going on a journey?"

"Yes. Get busy."

"That's the very reason why you should keep that arm out of danger till you get back. Jostling round in a crowd——"

"Is this my arm or yours?" thundered Burns.

Buller laughed. "Don't knock me down with it, Pepper-pot. It may be your arm, but you're my patient, and I——"

"Don't you fool yourself. If you won't fix me up I'll go out with it hanging. I can judge my own condition. Will you dress me and put my arm in this sling here, or must I send for Grayson? He's none of your idiotic conservatives."

"Keep quiet, and I'll make you look pretty, little boy. I see—these are new clothes just home from the tailor, and they're an elegant fit. Bully fresh scarf, peach of a pin, brand-new black silk sling—Oh, I say!"

For with his good left arm Burns was threatening his professional friend in a way that looked ominous. But a laugh was in his eye, now that he had got his way, and the altercation ended in a fire of jokes. Then Burns stood up.

"You're a jewel, Buller boy," said he. "You've brought me through in great shape. It was a nasty fracture, and you've given me an arm that'll be as good as new. I'm grateful—you know that. Now, if you'll look over that list I gave you of cases here in the city, and go out once to take a look at Letty Tressler, I'll be ever faithfully yours. Griggs'll see to my village practice. Now I'm off."

"Hope you enjoy your trip. Must be a concentrated pleasure, to be crammed into five days and still make you look like a schoolboy just let out," observed Buller as Burns turned, with his hand on the door-knob.

"A dose doesn't have to be big to be powerful," rejoined Burns, opening the door.

"Nitro-glycerin, eh?" Buller called after the departing bulk of his friend. "Don't let it carry you too far up. You might come down with a thud!"

"He's right enough there," was what Burns murmured to himself as he caught the elevator in the great building in which Buller's office was a crowded corner. "I may come down in just that style. But better that than any more of

this dead level of suspense. I don't think I could stand that one more day."

He and Johnny Caruthers whirled home in the Imp to find Burns's village office as crowded as Buller's city one. It was late before he could get his dinner, and after it he was kept busy turning calls over to other men. It was the usual experience to have work pile up during the last hours, as if Fate were against his breaking his chains and meant to tie him hand and foot.

"I'm going to get out of this right now," he announced suddenly to Miss Mathewson an hour before train time, as he turned away from a siege over the telephone with one hysterical lady who felt that her life depended upon his remaining to see her through an attack of indigestion. "If I don't, something will come in that will pull hard to keep me home, and I'm not going to be kept. I'll trust you not to look me up for the next hour, for I'll not tell you where I'm going, and you can't guess, you know. Good-bye. Be a good girl."

He wrung her hand, looking at her with that warmth of friendliness which he was accustomed, when in the mood, to bestow on her, recognizing how invaluable she was to him, and never once

recking what it meant to her to be so closely associated with him. She answered in her usual quiet way, wishing him a safe journey and bidding him to be very careful of the arm, no longer protected except by the silken sign that injury had been done.

"In a crowd, you know, they won't notice the sling," she warned him.

"Won't they? Well, if my trusty left can't protect my battered right I've forgotten my boxing tricks. Don't be anxious about that, little friend. See that Amy Mathewson has a good time in my absence, will you? She's looking just a bit worn, to me."

She smiled, but her eyes did not meet his: she dared not let them. With all his kindness to her he did not often speak with the real affection which was in his voice now. She understood that he was, for some reason, keyed high over his prospective journey—even higher than he had been ten days before when on the point of leaving. And she knew well enough where he was going, though he had not told her. It would have taken thirty-six hours to go to Washington, spent a brief time there and return. It was going to take

five days to go to South Carolina, remain long enough to transact his business—was it business? —and come back. And there had been no more attempts to write letters by way of an amanuensis. The affection for his assistant in his manner to her was genuine, she did not doubt that, but it did not deceive her for a moment. So, she did not let her eyes meet his. They rested, instead, on the scarfpin which Buller had termed a "peach," but they did not see it. She could not remember when it had been so hard to maintain that quiet control of herself which had long since made her employer cease to reckon with the possibilities of fire beneath.

R. P. Burns stole away with Johnny and the Imp, without so much as letting his neighbours know of his intentions. He had made sure that they were all well; that no incipient scarlet fever or invading measles was threatening them. He smiled to himself as the car went past the Chester house, to think how interested they would be to know where he was going. But he got safely off and nobody opened a door at sound of the Imp to call to him to come in a minute because somebody seemed not quite well.

And then, after all, he ran upon Arthur Chester —and at the city station, to which he had taken the precaution to go, although the ten-thirty stopped for a half-minute at the village. It must be admitted that he tried to dodge his best friend, but he did not succeed. His shoulders were too conspicuous: he could not get away.

"Going to see an out-of-town patient at this hour of night?" queried Chester, coming up warmly interested, as best friends have a trick of being, in spite of all that can be done to avert their curiosity.

"Where else would I be going?"

"I don't know where else, but I doubt if it's to see a patient. There's an air about you that's not professional. You—er—you can't be going to Washington? There's nobody there now."

"No, only a few Government officials and some odds and ends of hangers-on. To be sure, Congress is in session, but there's nobody there. My train's been called, Ches; so long."

"Let me carry your bag." Chester reached for it. "I say, this isn't a tool-kit—this is a stunner of a regulation travelling bag. See here, Red"—

he was rushing along on the other's side, fairly running to keep up with Burns's strides—"how long are you going to be gone?"

"Long enough to get a change of air. The atmosphere's heavy here with inquisitive people who call themselves your friends. See here, Ches, you're not looking well. You need rest and sleep. Go home and go to bed."

"You're always telling me to go home and go to bed. Not till I see which train you take," panted Chester, his eyes sparkling. "Ha! Going to turn in at Number Four gate, are you? Sorry I can't take your bag inside. Well, possibly I can guess your destination. Got your section clear through to South Carolina? I say, keep your head, old man, keep your head!"

Burns turned about, shook his fist at Arthur Chester, seized his bag, rushed through the gateway and boarded the last of the long string of Pullmans. On the platform he pulled off his hat and waved it at his friend. He could forgive anybody for anything to-night.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH HE MAKES NO EVENING CALL

BURNS opened the white gate—it was sagging a little on its hinges—and walked up the moss-grown path between the rows of live-oaks to the tall-columned portico of the still stately, if somewhat time-worn and decayed, mansion among the shrubbery. It was just at dusk, and far away somewhere a whippoorwill was calling. It was the only sound on the quiet air.

The door was opened by an old negro servant, who hesitated over his answer to the question put by this unknown person looming up before him with his arm in a sling. Mrs. Elmore was in, but she was not well and could not see any visitors this evening.

"Is Mrs. Lessing in?"

"Yes, sar, she is. But she done tole me she couldn't see nobody herse'f. She tekken' cah ob Miss Lucy."

Burns produced his card and made a persuasive

request. The old darky led the way to a long, nearly dark apartment, where the scent of roses mingled with the peculiar odour of old mahogany and ancient rugs and hangings. The servant lit a tall, antique lamp with crystal pendants hanging from its shade, the light from which fell upon a bowlful of crimson roses so that they glowed richly. He left Burns, departing with a shuffling step and an air of grudging the strange gentleman the occupancy of the room, although it was to be for only so long as it would take to bring back word that neither of the ladies would see him to-night.

Burns sat still for the space of two minutes; then, as no further sound could be heard in the quiet house, he became restless. His pulses beat rather heavily and, to quiet them or the sense of them, he got up and walked about, pausing at one of the long French windows to gaze out into the dusky labyrinth of a garden, where he could just make out paths winding about among the bushes. The night was mild, and the window stood ajar as if some one had lately come in.

Then he turned and saw her. She had almost reached him, but he had not heard her, her foot-

fall upon the old Turkey carpet with its faded roses and lilies had been so light. She was in white, and the light from the old lamp shone on her arms and face and brought out the shadows of her hair and eyes. She put out both hands—then quickly drew back one as her glance fell upon the sling, and gave him her left, smiling. But he drew the arm that had been broken out of its support and held it out.

"Please take this hand, too," he said. "It will be its first experience and, perhaps, it will put new life into it. It's pretty limp yet."

She laid hers in it very gently, looking down at it as his fingers closed slowly over hers.

"That's doing very well, I should think," she said. "It's barely time for it to be independent yet, is it?"

"About time. I had something of a wrestle with Doctor Buller to get him to leave the splints off. How warm and soft your hand is. This one of mine has forgotten how the touch of another hand feels."

"I'm sure you ought not to use it yet. Please put it back in the sling." She drew her own hand gently away.

It occurred to him that while he had been absent from her he had not been able to recall half her charm, and that if he had he would never have been able to wait half so long before pursuing her down into this Southern haunt of hers. He drew a full, contented breath.

"At last," he said, "I am face to face with you. It's worth the journey."

In the lamplight it seemed to him the roses cast a reflection on her face which he had not observed at first.

"I'm so sorry Aunt Lucy isn't able to see you to-night," she said—"unless she would consent to see you professionally. She really ought——"

He held up his hand. "Not unless she is in serious straits, please," he begged. "I've fled from patients, only to find them all the way down on the train. I don't know what there can be about me to suggest to a conductor that I'm the man he's looking for to attend some emergency case, but he seems to spot me. Only at the station before this did I get released from the last of the series. Let me forget my profession for a bit if I can. Just now I'm only a man who's come a long way to see you. Is it really you?"

He leaned forward, studying her intently. His head, with its coppery thatch of heavy hair, showed powerful lines in the lamplight; beneath his dark brows the hazel eyes glowed black.

"It's certainly I," she answered lightly. "And being I, with the mistress of the house prevented from showing you hospitality, I must offer it. She begged me to make you comfortable and to tell you she would see you in the morning. You've had a long journey. You must want the comfort of a room and hot water. I'll ring for Old Sam."

She crossed the room and pulled an old-fashioned bell-cord, upon which a bell was heard to jangle far away. The old darky reappeared.

"I should have gone to a hotel," Burns said, "if I could have found one in the place."

"There is none. And if there had been Aunt Lucy would have been much hurt to have you go there. Where did you leave your bag?"

"At the station. I can stay only for a night and a day, so it's a small one."

"I'll send Young Sam for it. Now let Sam take you to your room, and in a few minutes I'll give you supper."

"Don't bother about supper at this hour. I only want——"

"You want what you are to have,—some of Sue's delicious Southern cookery." She smiled at him as he looked back at her, following the old servant. "She's been in the family for forty years and she loves to have company to appreciate her dishes. Sam, you are to help Doctor Burns. He has had a broken arm."

When Burns came down, fresh from a bath and comfortable with clean linen, he smelled odours which made him realize that, eager as he was for other things, he was human enough to be intensely hungry with a healthy man's appetite. So he surrendered himself to the fortunes that now befell him.

Old Sam conducted him to the dining-room, a quaintly attractive apartment where candle-light illumined the bare mahogany of the round table laid with a large square of linen at his place and set with delicate ancient china and silver. Ellen Lessing was already there in a high-backed chair opposite the one set for him, a figure to which his eyes were again drawn irresistibly and upon which they continued to rest as he took his seat.

Sam disappeared toward the kitchen, and Burns spoke in a low voice across the table.

"I feel as if I were in a dream," said he. "Forty-eight hours ago I was rushing about, hundreds of miles from here, trying to attend to the wants of a lot of people who seemed determined not to let me get away. Now I'm down here in the midst of all this quiet and peace, with you before me to look at, and nobody to demand anything of me for at least twenty-four hours. It's all too good to be true."

"It seems rather odd to me, too," she answered, letting her eyes stray from his and rest upon the bowl of japonicas of a glowing pink, which stood in the centre of the table. The candle-light made little starry points in her dark eyes as she looked at the rich-hued blooms. "The last person in the world I was expecting to see to-night was you."

"I suppose I was as far from your thoughts as your expectation," he suggested.

"How should I be thinking of a person who had not written to me for so long I thought he had forgotten me?" she asked, and then as he broke out into a delighted laugh at her expense she grew as

pink as her flowers and seemed to welcome the return of Sam bearing a trayful of Sue's good things to eat.

Fried chicken and sweet potatoes, beaten biscuit and fragrant coffee, had a flavour all their own to Burns that night. He ate as a hungry man should, yet never forgot his companion for a moment or allowed her to imagine that he forgot her. And by and by the meal was over and the two rose from the table.

"I must go and see that Auntie is comfortable for the night, if you will excuse me for half an hour," said the person he had come to see. "Will you wait in the drawing-room? I will have Sam bring you some late magazines."

"I'll wait, and no magazines, thank you. I can fill the time somehow," he answered. "But don't let it be more than the half-hour, will you?"

He watched her until she disappeared from his sight at the turn of the staircase landing, then went in to pace up and down the long room, his left arm folded over his right, after the fashion he had acquired since the right arm became useless. After what seemed an interminable interval she came back. He met her at the door.

"Are the duties all done?" he inquired.

"All done for the present. I must look in on Auntie by and by, but I think she is going to sleep."

"May she sleep the sleep of the just! And there's nothing more you feel it incumbent upon you to do for me? No more sending me to my room, no more waiting upon me by Sam, no more feeding me till my capacity is reached? Is there really no notion in your mind as to how you can put off the coming hour?"

His voice had its old, whimsical inflection, but there was a deeper note in it, too. She parried him gently, yet not quite so composedly as was her wont.

"Why should I want to put it off? Aren't we going to sit down and have a delightful talk? I want to hear all about Bob and Martha and all of them, and about your work since I saw you."

"You want to hear all about those things, do you? I had the impression that we discussed them quite thoroughly while I was at supper. Still, I can go over them all again if you insist. It may take up another five minutes, and when one is fencing for time, even five minutes counts."

It was his old way, with a vengeance. There was a saying of Arthur Chester's current among his and Burns's friends that it never was of any use to try to evade Red Pepper when once he had begun to fire upon your defenses. With his eyes searching you and his insolent tongue putting point blank questions to you, you might as well capitulate first as last.

There being no conceivable answer to this thrust about fencing for time, even for a woman experienced in replying skilfully to men under all sorts of conditions, Ellen Lessing was forced to look up or play the part of a shy girl. So she looked up, lifting her head bravely. There really was nothing else to do.

It was all in his face. He had not come all those hundreds of miles to pay her an evening call, nor did he mean to be put off longer. His eyes held hers: she could not withdraw them.

"It's odd," he said, speaking slowly, "how like a magnet drawing a steel bar you've drawn me down here. Pull—pull—pull—an irresistible force. I wonder if the magnet feels the attraction, too? Could it pull so hard if it didn't?"

There was a long minute during which neither

stirred—it might have been the counterpart of that minute, months back, when they had first observed each other. Recognition it was, perhaps, at the very first; there could be no question about the recognition now—it went deep.

Suddenly he slipped his right arm out of the sling. Before she could draw breath she was in the circle of his arms, but he had not touched her.

"Am I wrong?" he was saying. "Has it pulled both ways from the first?"

It must be as useless for the magnet to resist as for the bar. And when they have come within a certain distance of each other——

If Red Pepper's left arm caught her in the stronger grasp, the right did all, and more than all, that could have been expected of it. It was his right arm which slowly drew her hands up, one after the other, and indicated to them that their place was, locked together, behind his neck.

An old garden in South Carolina is a place to lure the Northerner out-of-doors. Before breakfast next morning Burns was walking down the box-bordered paths, feasting his gaze and his sense of fragrance on the clumps of blue and white

violets, the clusters of gay crocuses, the splendid spikes of Roman hyacinths. But he did not fail to keep track of all doorways in sight, and when she appeared at the open French window of the drawing-room he was there in a thrice, offering her a bunch of purple violets and feasting his eyes upon her morning freshness.

"I'm still dreaming, I think," said he when he had drawn her back into the quiet room long enough to satisfy himself with the active demonstration that possession means privilege, and had himself fastened the violets in the front of her crisp white morning dress. "Dreaming that I can stay down here in this wonderful paradise with you and not go back to the slave's life I lead."

"You would never be happy away from that slave's life long, you know," she reminded him. "The rush of it is the joy of it to you."

"How will it be to you? I shall be yours, you remember, till Joe Tressler or any other ne'er-do-weel wants me, then I'm his."

"But you'll always come back to me," said she.

"And will you be content with that?"

"So long as you want to come back."

He looked steadily into her eyes, and his own

took fire. "Want to come back! I've waited a long time to find the woman I could be sure I should always want to come back to. I thought there would never be such a woman: not for an erratic fellow like me. . . . But now—I'm wondering how I shall ever be able to stay away!"

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH HE DEFIES SUPERSTITION

SHADES of Hymen! Red, are you making calls this morning?"

"Why not? I'm not to be married till noon, am I?"

"I say, take me with you, will you? I want to go along with a man who has the nerve to see patients up to the last minute before his wedding!"

"Takes less nerve than to sit around and wait for the fateful hour, I should say. Come on, if you think you'll have time to dress when you get back. It may be close work."

"Haven't you got to dress yourself?" demanded Arthur Chester, settling himself in the car beside its driver. "Or shall you go to the altar in tweeds with April mud on your boots?"

"Rather than not get there, yes. But I can dress in half the time you can—always could, and necessity has developed the art. Look here, there isn't any April mud. The roads are fine."

"Oh, I suppose if I were booked for a wedding journey in the Green Imp before the leaves were fairly out I shouldn't be able to see any mud myself. As it is, well, I don't know the colour of the bride's motoring clothes, but I presume they'll be adapted to the circumstances. I never saw her look anything but ready for whatever situation she happened to be in. That's a trick that'll serve her many a good turn as the wife of R. P. Burns, M.D., eh, Red?"

The Imp whirled about the country all the morning, having made an early start. The car was in fine fettle, like a horse that has been trained for a race. Although it was beginning its second season it had never been in better trim for business. The engine, having been cared for and seldom abused, was running more smoothly than when it had been first put upon the road. The Imp had had a fresh coat of the dark-green which gave it its name, and its brasswork was shining as only Johnny Caruthers by long and untiring labours could make metal shine. It had that morning acquired a luggage-rack attached to its rear, which was soon to receive a leather-covered motor trunk at that moment receiving its final consign-

ments in the Macauley house; and there were several other new fittings about the machine which indicated that it was presently to be put to uses which had never been required of it before.

The Imp drew up in front of the hospital. Chester looked anxiously at his watch for the twenty-seventh time that morning. "For Heaven's sake, hurry, Red," he urged. "Women are the dickens about having a wedding late, and it's ten minutes of eleven now. Noon comes sure and soon, and at noon, allow me to remind you——"

Burns nodded. "Keep cool, boy," he recommended. "No use getting excited before a critical operation."

But he disappeared at a pace fast enough to satisfy Chester, who sat back and said to himself that R. P. had come nearer giving the crisis before him its appropriate name than he had ever heard done before.

He became anxious again, however, before Burns returned, and his watch was in his hand when the prospective bridegroom bolted out of the hospital door and ran for his car as if he had not a moment to spare.

"Glad to see you're losing your head a trifle

at last," commented Chester as the Imp turned a dizzy curve and shot away. "It's the only proper thing. But we've really enough time if you don't stop anywhere else. What's the matter? Good Lord, man, you'll get nabbed if you speed up like this within limits. You——"

"Cut it and don't talk. I've got to make time," was all the answer or explanation he received; and Chester, with the wisdom of long association with Red Pepper at his pepperiest, obeyed.

As they approached the house Burns spoke for the first time since they had left the city. "Go in and tell the bunch I have to do an operation at the hospital as quick as I can get my stuff and drive back there. I'll be back at——"

"Great Christopher, man! But——"

"I can be back by two. Ellen will understand."

"The deuce she will! Don't ask me to explain to her."

"I won't. I'll do it myself. You tell the rest."

The Imp shot up the driveway. Burns jumped out and ran to his office. Five minutes later, instrument bag in hand, he ran out again, Miss Mathewson following. He bolted in at the Macauley's front door. Chester had already broken the

incredible news to Martha Macauley and was standing out a storm of expostulations and reproaches, as if by any chance anybody could expect Arthur Chester to be able to stop R. P. Burns when he had started upon any course of action whatsoever. But when Burns himself appeared at the doorway the situation came to a crisis. Towering beside a group of palms which decorated the foot of the staircase Burns demanded to see Ellen.

"Why, Red, you can't. She's—besides—how can you——"

"Ask her to come where I can speak to her then. Quick, please."

"But she——"

There was no knowing how long the sparring might have lasted, or what extreme measures might have been taken, had not a figure in a floating lilac-and-white garment, with two long braids of dark hair hanging over its shoulders, appeared upon the staircase landing. Burns looked up, saw it, and was up the stairs to the landing before Chester could flick an eyelash.

"Dear, to save a life I want to delay things just two hours. There's nobody else to do it.

Van Horn was taken ill just as he was getting ready. The only other man who would venture under the conditions—Grayson—is out of town."

His arms were about her as she stood a step above him. So, her eyes were level with his.

"Do it, of course," she whispered. "And take my love with you."

For one minute Burns stayed to tell her that he had known she would send him to his duty, then he was off. The door slammed behind him, and outside the Imp's horn sent back a parting salute.

From the bottom stair Martha Macauley, distressed young matron and hostess, gazed up at her sister, who, with arms leaning on the vine-wreathed rail at the landing, was smiling down at her.

"Ellen! Was ever anything so crazy! I did suppose Red would take time enough to be married in. There's everybody coming——"

"So few you can easily telephone them all to wait."

"And the breakfast under way——"

"It will keep."

"Aren't you superstitious enough not to want to postpone your wedding?" demanded Martha urgently.

The dark braids of hair swung violently as the bride's head was emphatically shaken. "Martha! Take it back! Let somebody die because I was afraid to wait two hours?"

"I don't believe anybody would die," insisted Martha. "Somebody could be found. It's just Red's ridiculous craze for surgery. I always said he'd rather operate than eat. Now, it seems, he'd rather operate than be——"

But at this moment a large, determined hand came over her mouth from behind, as James Macauley, Junior, arriving upon the scene, asserted his authority. He was in bathrobe and slippers, having been excitedly interviewed by Chester through the bathroom door.

"Quit fussing, Marty. The thing can't be helped, and if Ellen doesn't mind I don't know why we should. If we were having a houseful it would be fierce, but with only ourselves and the Chesters and the minister's family and Red's people—I'll go telephone Mr. Harding now."

As Martha freed herself from the silencing

and the front door opened again. This time it was Mrs. Richard Warburton—Burns's young sister Anne—also in somewhat informal attire, over which she had thrown an evening coat. She surveyed the group with laughing eyes. She herself had been married within the year.

"It's absurd, isn't it?" she cried. "But it's just like Red. Ellen knows that, don't you, dear? Ellen'll not only take him for better and for worse, but for present and for absent—mostly absent! But we're rather proud of him over at the house. Father's walking up and down and saying no other fellow would have done it, and Mother's all tearful and smiling. Dick wanted to go in with him, but of course Miss Mathewson had to go: he seldom operates without her."

"It's so uncertain when he'll get back," mourned Martha, still unreconciled.

"I made Miss Mathewson promise to telephone, the moment she should know. It's lucky the wedding guests are all in the family, isn't it? Ellen, dear"—pretty Anne ran up the stairs to the landing—"I really don't see how, after he caught sight of you in that fascinating garb, with your hair down, he could ever tear himself away!

You're positively the loveliest thing I ever saw in all my life, and I'm almost out of my senses with joy that you're to be my sister, even though I never saw you in the world till yesterday! I always said when Red did care for anybody for keeps, she'd be a jewel!"

Red Pepper came back at precisely twenty minutes of three. His patient had given him a bad hour of anxiety immediately after leaving the table, and he could not desert her until she had rallied. But he felt easy about her now, and he had arranged to leave her in Buller's hands—Buller, who did not do major surgery himself, but was a most competent man when it came to the care of surgical patients after operation. Burns brought Amy Mathewson back with him, though she had begged to be allowed to stay with the case.

"And not be at my wedding?" cried Red Pepper, in exuberant spirits. "Why, I couldn't be properly married without you to see me through!"

Upon which she had smiled and obeyed him, and taken a tighter grip upon herself as he put

her into the Green Imp for the last ride together. That was what it was to her, though she might yet go with him a thousand times to help him in his work. To him it was a quick and joyful journey back to his marriage.

"All right, Mother and Dad!" he exulted, coming in upon them in their festal array. He shook hands with his father and his brother-in-law; he kissed his mother. Then he ran for his own room where Bobby Burns, just being finished off by Anne, herself superbly dressed, shrieked with rapture at the sight of him.

"Red! At last! I've laid everything ready; you've only to jump into your bath; I turned on the water when Dick saw the Imp down the road. Don't you dare have a vestige of a surgical odour about you when you come out!"

In precisely seventeen minutes and three-quarters the bridegroom was ready to the last coppery hair on his head.

"Have I a 'surgical odour,' Anne?" he asked as he came up to her.

She buried her face on his shoulder, both arms about him, regardless of her finery. "You're the dearest, sweetest old trump of a brother

that ever lived, and you smell like sunshine and fresh air!" she cried. Whereat he shook with laughter and patted her back as she clung to him.

"Promise me, Red," she begged, lifting her head, "that you won't let anything—anything —keep you from going off with Ellen in the Imp. She's been so lovely about this horrid delay, but I'm always suspicious of you. Promise!"

"I promise you this," agreed her brother: "Wherever the Imp and I go, after the minister has said the words, for this two weeks Ellen shall go with me."

"Chester," said Dick Warburton as he stood in that gentleman's company, looking over a stupendous assortment of wedding gifts, which, in spite of the fact that nobody outside the family had been asked to see Redfield Pepper Burns married, overflowed two large rooms into the upper hall and almost over the railing, "will you tell me who in the name of time sent that rat-trap? This is the most extraordinary display of gold, silver, and tinware that I ever saw, and I'm at the end of my astonishment. But that rat-trap, is it a joke?"

"No joke whatever," declared Chester. "It comes from one of Red's devoted friends—his own invention. And the point of the thing is that the making of that rat-trap is going to be the making of the worst dead-beat of a patient Red ever stood by. I really believe Joe Tressler's going to get a patent on it, which also will be Red's doing. But this is a special, particular rat-trap made of extra fine materials, suitable for a wedding gift!"

"Well, well," mused Burns's brother-in-law. "And what millionaire sent the diamond pendant? By Jove, I haven't seen finer jewels than those this side of the water."

"That came from the Walworths, I believe. Take it all together, it's a great collection, isn't it? It shows up the odder because Ellen wouldn't have the freak grateful-patient gifts put to one side—or even thrown into a sort of refining shadow. Fix your eye on that rainbow quilt, will you, Dicky, alongside of the Florentine tapestry? That quilt would put out your eye if you gazed upon it steadily, so let up on it by regarding this match-safe. Wouldn't that——"

"That came from Johnny Caruthers," said a

richly modulated low voice behind him. "Please set it down carefully, Mr. Arthur Chester."

The two men wheeled to see the bride come to the defense of her wedding gifts. Behind her loomed her husband, laughing over her head, his eyes none the less tender, like hers, for the queer presents which meant no less of love and gratitude than the costlier gifts, of which there was no mean array.

"I see you've married him, patients and all, Ellen Burns," declared Richard Warburton. "On the whole, it's your wisest course. The less he knows you mind their devotion to him——"

"Mind it!" She gave him the flash of which the soft black eyes were brilliantly capable. "Dick, I have no gift I like so well as that rat-trap. You don't know the story, but I do, and it means to me—fidelity to duty. And if there's one great big thing in the world I think it's that!"

Over her head, Dick Warburton nodded at his brother-in-law. "I'm glad we've got her into the family, Red," said he. "It's a mighty rare thing to find a beautiful woman who knows how to dress like a picture, with *that* ideal at the back of her head! Cherish her, Red. If

you don't I'll come around and knock you down!"

"I'll let you do it," agreed Burns soberly. All his marriage vows were in his face.

It was quite dusk when the Green Imp got away. Johnny Caruthers had the satisfaction of lighting up the car's lamps—always a joy to him, and particularly so to-night, for even the oil tail-light bore witness to his trimming and polishing till its red eye could gleam no brighter. As for the front lamps and the searchlight—the Imp's progress would be as down an avenue of brilliance if its driver allowed them all full play upon the road.

"She's in great trim, Johnny," said Burns's voice in his ear. "I like her looks immensely. I shall hate to get a speck of mud on her."

"Meaning the lady, Doc?" asked Johnny anxiously. "There's a wet bit there under the elms, Doc, remember. It would be a pity to splash any mud on her!"

He glanced toward the porch, his freckled face eloquent of his admiration for the figure which was the centre of the group gathered there.

Burns's eyes followed his. Bob, a picturesque, small person in his wedding attire of white linen, was attempting to tie Ellen's motor-veil for her, as she stooped, smiling, to the level of his eager little arms. It occurred to both master and man, as they watched the child's efforts to adjust the floating chiffon, that veils, however useful, were to be regretted when they were allowed even partially to obscure faces like those of Red Pepper's wife.

"I meant the car, lad," explained Burns, laughing. "You've done a great piece of work on her since I brought her home this afternoon. I'm afraid you've done some last polishing with your wedding clothes on, Johnny. Here's something to take the spots out."

"Oh, Doc!" breathed the boy. "Not to-night. Let me do it—for you—and her."

The money went back into Burns's pocket, and his hand met Johnny's in a hearty grasp. "That's better yet," said he, "and thank you, John. If anybody but you were sending me off I'd ask if everything was surely in the car. But I'll not even ask you."

"You don't need to," vowed the boy proudly.

"And there's some things in you don't need to know about, just extrys in case of break-down."

"Now, that," said his employer, "is what I call proving one's self a friend."

The Imp went cautiously through the "wet bit," for it lay under the corner arc-light, and Johnny Caruthers would be watching. But, once on the open road outside the village, the pace quickened. For late April the roads were not bad, and if they had been sloughs the Imp could have pulled through them. She had a great power hidden away in those six cylinders of hers, had the Imp.

"You'll not mind if I stop at the hospital as we go through?" questioned Burns. "Then we'll be off, out the old west road, out of reach of telephones and summonses of any sort. But I shall be just that much easier——"

"Do stop, please. I'm sure you'll be more satisfied—and so shall I."

She sat quietly in the car while he was gone, looking up at the lighted windows and thinking all sorts of sympathetic thoughts concerning those inside—yet with a tiny fear in her heart

that he would find some new and unavoidable duty to detain him. If he should——

But he was back, and as the Imp's search-light fell upon his face, returning, she read there that he was free.

"Doing well, everything satisfactory, and I've not a care in the world," he exulted as he leaped in. "Now we're off, and never a stop till we've put a wide space between us and the rest of them."

The Green Imp ran at its quietest along the city streets, then through the thinning suburbs, and finally, with the lights all behind them, the open country ahead, the long, low car came out upon the straight highway which leads a hundred miles before it comes again to any but insignificant hamlets and small, rustic inns.

Burns had said little thus far, but as he glanced over his shoulder at the now distant lights of the city he suddenly spoke low, out of the quiet:

"We're out of reach of everything and everybody; nobody even knows the road we're taking. We're all alone in the world together. You can't think what that means to me. I've lived nine years at the call of every soul that wanted me: hardly a vacation except for study. A fortnight

seems pretty short allowance for a honeymoon; we'll take a longer one when we go to Germany in the fall. But—*for two weeks*——"

He looked down at her in the April starlight. He bent to finish the statement, whatever it might have been, upon her lips, for speech failed him. Then, with a happy laugh, he gave the Green Imp her head.

THE END